

agenda

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agenda

s u m m e r 2 0 0 8

the case for the european union

Why do we so rarely, if ever, hear the case for the European Union? A healthy distrust of politicians may be no bad thing, and it is noteworthy that the more local they are the more politicians are held in some regard. Polling evidence shows that people believe the National Assembly works in the interests of Wales more than the Westminster Parliament. Being even further away we can expect the Brussels bureaucracy and the Strasbourg Parliament to be low down in people's affections. If a referendum were held in Wales on the Lisbon Treaty it is likely it would go the same way as the one held in Ireland in June when, for a plethora of reasons (many of them nothing to do with the Treaty), the Irish gave a thumbs down to the structural changes that are needed to cope with the expansion of the European Union to 26 member states.

Yet we in Wales have benefited from the EU almost to the same extent as the Irish. The Common Agricultural Policy has supported our farmers for decades. West Wales and the Valleys have been targeted with Objective 1 investment, followed by Convergence Funding for the next six years. It is unlikely that the UK government would have acknowledged the needs of this large territory to this extent if the EU had not stepped in.

More fundamentally, European institutions have been a major guarantee of peace and the rule of law since World War II. In short they have ensured we have a 'European roof over Germany, rather than a German roof over Europe'. The European Union has brought free movement of goods, services and people to nearly 500 million citizens. It has brought democracy and an independent judiciary to former dictatorships, without loss of life. The European Union is the largest source of third world development finance and the world's foremost humanitarian aid donor.

And yet it has failed to win the affection of probably most Europeans. Some of the reasons are explored in the article by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, that we republish from *Der Spiegel* on pages 23-25. In particular, we commend his proposal that a Europe-wide referendum be held on the same day as the European Parliament elections next year. He argues this should be framed to allow us to decide in principle whether we wish Europe's institutions to operate in a democratic way over matters that can only be effectively managed at the European level. It should be made clear that a yes vote would include democratic reform of the institutions. One proposal would be to empower the European Parliament to elect the President of the Council of Ministers. "When I want to talk to Europe," Henry Kissinger famously asked, "Who do I call?" If the European Union is to function effectively in the 21st Century there needs to be an answer to that question.



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coming up...

- **Treftadaeth Yfory / Heritage Tomorrow IWA Eisteddfod Lecture**
Speaker: Alun Ffred Jones AM, Minister for Heritage
Tuesday 5th August, 12.30pm
The Pagoda, Eisteddfod Showground, Cardiff
- **Transformation Nation: Responding to Climate Change**
Friday-Saturday 19-20th September
Y Tabernacl, Machynlleth
Keynote Speakers: George Monbiot, Sir John Houghton, Patrick Holden, Mark Lynas, Morgan Parry
- **Wales in the World conference**
Monday 20th October, Holiday Inn Cardiff. Keynote Speakers: Rhodri Morgan, First Minister; Professor Richard Wyn Jones, Director, Institute of Welsh Politics; Professor Dylan Jones-Evans, Director of Research and Innovation, University of Wales
- **IWA Gwent Branch dinner**
Friday 25th October, 7:30pm to 8:00pm, Newport University, Caerleon
Speaker: Rt Hon Paul Murphy, Secretary of State for Wales
- **Innovation in Health and Social Care Delivery – IWA-Academy Health Wales Conference**
Monday 10th November, 9:00am, Parc Thistle Hotel, Cardiff
Keynote Speakers: Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Chief Executive, Medical Research Council; Dr Tony Jewell, Chief Medical Officer for Wales

just published...

- **Futures for the Heads of the Valleys**
IWA-Regeneration Institute, Cardiff. £15
- **Ending Sovereignty's Denial**
by John Osmond. £5
- **Media in Wales – Serving Public Values**
Geraint Talfan Davies & Nick Morris. £10

more information

www.iwa.org.uk

icarus balance

elystan morgan charts a route through the maze of the 2006 Wales Act towards Wales's next constitutional advance

The 2006 Government of Wales Act points the way to a new future for Wales. It contains many problems but its potential for the people of Wales is very considerable indeed. For some, it is a deeply frustrating, mediaeval maze. To others, it represents a clear, albeit tortuous, path to a superior status for Wales as a nation. Whether this legislation succeeds or is allowed to drift into irrelevance depends entirely on what we, the people of Wales, are determined to make of it.

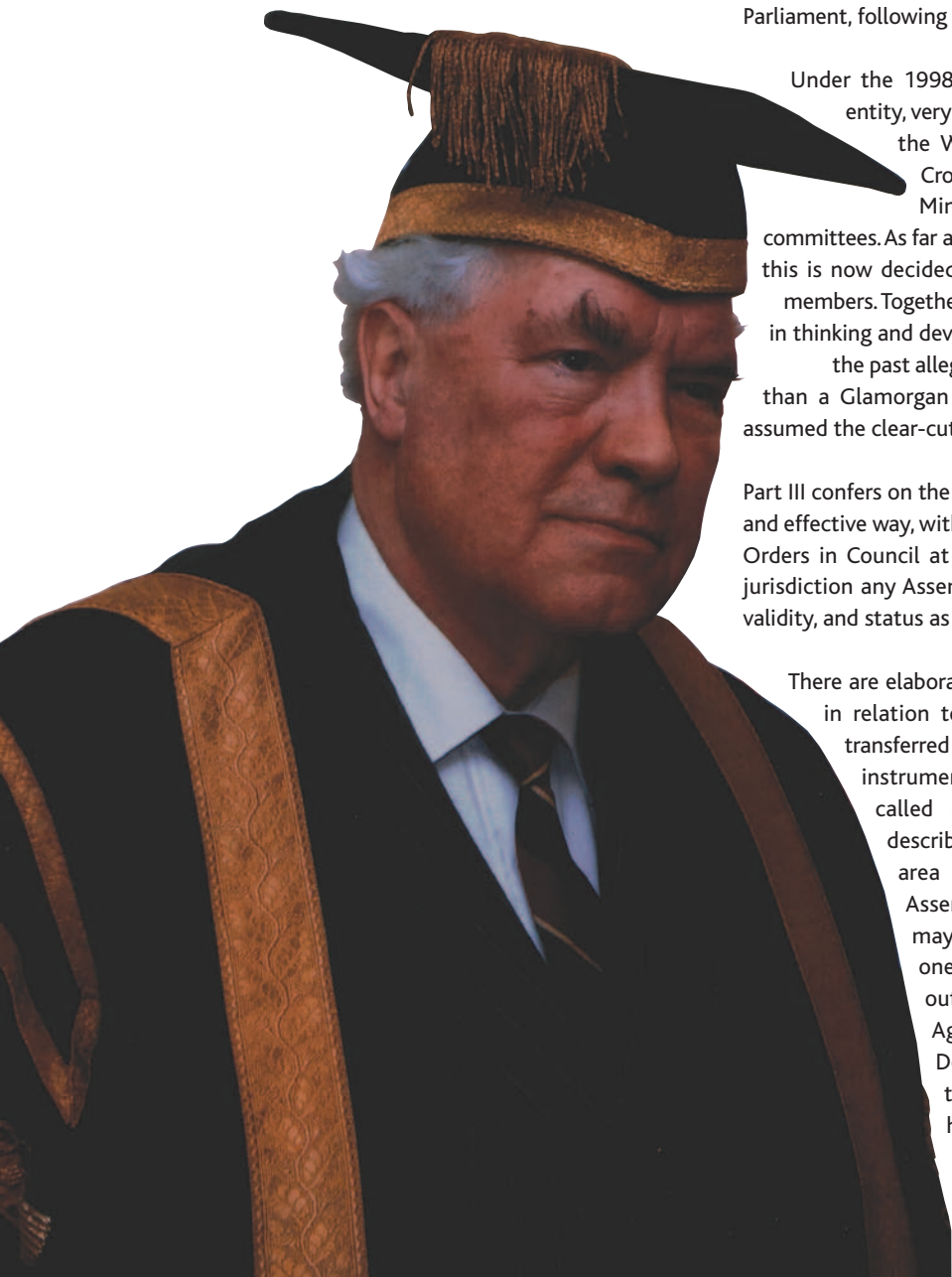
A small part of the 2006 Act is no more than a re-publication of the contents of the Government of Wales Act 1998. However, Parts II, III, and IV are, in each case, of considerable significance. Part II establishes the Welsh Assembly Government in its own right, and makes it answerable to the National Assembly. Part III contains procedures, albeit complicated ones, for the Assembly to enact what is, in effect, primary legislation. Meanwhile Part IV enables the Assembly to constitute itself as a full law-making Parliament, following a positive referendum result.

Under the 1998 Act the Assembly was one indivisible entity, very much like a local government body. Now, the Welsh executive, with Ministers of the Crown, is wholly separate from the Assembly. Ministers are no longer members of committees. As far as delegated legislation is concerned, this is now decided by Ministers rather than by Assembly members. Together, these changes represent a leap forward in thinking and development. Whatever the truth may be of the past allegation that the Assembly was "little more than a Glamorgan County Council on stilts", it has now assumed the clear-cut outline of a potential parliament.

Part III confers on the Assembly powers to legislate in a robust and effective way, within corridors of authority granted to it by Orders in Council at Westminster. Within those swathes of jurisdiction any Assembly Measure will have the same force, validity, and status as an Act of Parliament.

There are elaborate processes before legislative authority in relation to a new matter can be approved and transferred from Westminster to Cardiff. The magical instrument which sets these things in motion is called a Legislative Competence Order, as described in Sections 94 to 102 of the Act. An area of jurisdiction sought by the Welsh Assembly from the Westminster Parliament may be narrow or wide. But it must fit into one of the 20 subject matters that are set out in Schedule 5 to the Act, ranging from Agriculture, Health, Economic Development, and Local Government to the Welsh Language and Culture. There have already been very considerable

Lord Elystan Morgan in his robes as President of Aberystwyth University, 2007.



transfers of executive authority in these matters from the establishment of the Welsh Office in 1964 onwards. They were all devolved to the National Assembly in 1998.

The procedure for the establishment of a Legislative Competence Order is as follows. First, there must be a resolution by the Welsh Assembly following a debate on the general principles, with the text to be prepared in both English and Welsh. A draft of the Order is then sent to the Secretary of State for Wales, who must within 60 days either lay it before Parliament or state in writing reasons for not doing so.

Potentially, therefore, the Secretary of State is in a powerful position. However, if an Order was rejected capriciously, or as part of a political stance against the National Assembly, I have no doubt that would be the best recruiting officer that Welsh nationalism has enjoyed for a very long time.

Once the Order in Council has been approved by both Houses, and received the assent of the Queen, the Assembly is entitled to legislate within that defined area as if it was a domestic Parliament. Thereafter the jurisdiction in that area remains completely with the Welsh Assembly.

In making Orders in Council it is absolutely necessary that there should be the fullest co-operation between politicians and civil servants in Cardiff and London. The beauty of the situation is that it presupposes a great deal of flexibility and of compromise. Nonetheless, at the end of the day each House of Parliament has to vote either totally for or against the instrument. There can be no amendment; it is 'take it or leave it'.

The following can be fairly said of this process. The procedural steps can be complicated and frustrating and there may well be delays. The first Legislative Competence Order under the 2006 Act started life in June 2007 and took nearly ten months to pass through all its processes. Three other Legislative Competence Orders are in the pipeline: one relating to environmental protection; another dealing with vulnerable children and child poverty; and a third with affordable housing. There is presently a shopping list of more than 20 Orders that have been discussed within the Assembly.

We need to proceed as quickly as we reasonably can with these proposals, avoiding long delays, but making sure that we establish a strong foundation to build on in the years to come. The procedures have the potential for transferring a large amount of legislative jurisdiction from Westminster to Cardiff. Some argue that the potential is so great that it will render unnecessary the move to the ultimate transfer of power by way of Part IV of the Act. However, for that to be true there would have to be a massive transfer of power taking place solidly and swiftly over many years.

In my view it would be very wrong to regard part III of the Act as amounting in any way to being an alternative to Part IV. Instead, Part III should be seen as a bridge to Part IV. Successful handling of Part III will show that Assembly Members have the capacity to handle substantial legislation and develop and

mould it in a Welsh way. It should also demonstrate a growing maturity in the relationship between Cardiff and London, which should be dealt with in a spirit of compromise and chivalry.

At the same time we should regard operating within Part III as a period of purgatory that lies between the present constitutional status of Wales and our achieving Part IV and the creation of a domestic Parliament. Part III means giving the Assembly, and the people of Wales, confidence in our capacity to make laws in a just and creative way. It is important, therefore, that a balance should be struck between Legislative Competence Orders that only make minor changes and ones that aspire to more revolutionary measures that might cause controversy and conflict. We have to find a middle way between these extremes. Remember always the Greek myth of Icarus and his father who were exiled on an island. To escape they made wings of feathers and wax and had to avoid soaring too high causing their wings to be melted by the sun, and yet flying high enough to avoid descending into the waves. In the next two or three years, the story of Wales will be very much trying to achieve an Icarus balance in relation to Part III of the 2006 Wales Act.

We should remember that over many long centuries the Houses of Parliament have mastered the art of drafting and scrutinising legislation. Even then, as we know, mistakes are often made. This is all the more important as far as the Assembly is concerned since we have no second house to scrutinise legislation. For the first eight years of its existence the Assembly spent only a small fraction of its time scrutinising draft legislation, line by line.

I turn now to Part IV of the 2006 Act which, as I have said, contains the blueprint for a Home Rule Parliament, the sort of parliament that William Ewart Gladstone, Tom Ellis, and Lloyd George talked about at the end of the 19th Century. In many respects the powers that the Assembly will have after full implementation of Part IV are similar to those enjoyed by the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Scotland, of course, has powers to raise tax by up to three pence in the pound, but so far it has not contemplated using these.

The powers transferable to a Welsh Parliament are those listed in Schedule 7 of the Act and are, in fact, the same areas referred to in the 20 'fields' in Schedule 5. It is of some significance that Schedules 5 and 7 cover broadly the same areas.

There are two main things to remember in relation to Part IV of the 2006 Act. The first is that it is one and indivisible. There can be no question now of amending any of the provisions of Part IV. They are set in stone in the Act itself. To quote the immortal words of Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam:

*"The moving finger writes
and having writ moves on:
nor all thy piety nor wit
shall lure it back to cancel half a line
nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."*

The second thing to remember is that Part IV gives the Welsh people nothing of itself. What it does give us is an option. It does not create an institution in the first instance. Instead, it offers the Welsh people the chance to grasp or to reject a Parliament.

I turn now to the detailed procedures of Part IV. The fundamental decisions are to be taken by the Welsh Assembly and then by the Welsh people. It is true there are blocking powers that could be used by either House of the Westminster Parliament or the Secretary of State for Wales. Yet if this was done unjustly and the Welsh people saw this as an affront to their will as a nation, then I have no doubt that the result would be to mobilise Welsh opinion spectacularly in favour of a higher constitutional status for Wales.

Thus far it all sounds marvellously simple. As an instrument a referendum has the most powerful possibilities, in part because of the activation of the huge prospect that it provides. All we need is the right atmosphere and the correct decisions made by those conducting a vigorous referendum campaign in favour of a Parliament and we will win. On the other hand, we all know that it can also be very simple to lose a referendum if the wrong decisions are made, and the wrong tactics deployed.

Senedd building in Cardiff Bay – "It has now assumed the clear-cut outline of a potential parliament."



May I say a few words of personal testimony in this particular regard. In the 1979 referendum I was the Chairman of the 'Yes' campaign. In October 1978, although the polls were not in any way uniform, one poll did place the 'Yes' campaign some 5 per cent ahead. However, matters deteriorated steadily as we approached the day of the vote, on 1 March 1979. In the event, the effort to establish an Assembly was lost by some 75 per cent to 25 per cent of those voting. When going to his execution in 1641 the Earl of Strafford, Thomas Wentworth, an adviser to Charles I, said, "Place not your trust in Princes". We, too, should be very careful in the way we place our trust in pollsters.

I have further testimony from a later period. On 6 June 2006, when the committee stage of the Government of Wales Act was before the House of Lords, a Tory amendment proposed that the two-thirds majority of Assembly Members to trigger a referendum should be reduced to 51 per cent. I could hardly believe my eyes. It could not have been accidental. Very few things happen by accident in politics. Many will remember the story of the Austrian diplomat Metternich during one of the international conferences in the early part of the 19th Century that he was attending. He was roused at 3.00am to be told that the French representative had died. His words were, "What was his motive?"

Politicians do few things without a motive. Here was a party that had generally shown luke-warm support for devolution and, indeed, outright opposition on more than one occasion to the idea of a Welsh Parliament. Why should they now be seeking to lower the bar, as it were, to holding a referendum? However, if one looked at two other amendments proposed by the same members, the ugly truth became apparent.

The first of those other amendments was that, in the event of a referendum failing, there should be no further referendum for four years. The second was that, if no referendum were passed for 10 years, whether in fact there had been any attempt in holding one or not, then Part IV of the Act should be cancelled completely.

I therefore ask myself the question, "How should we prepare ourselves for a successful referendum?" The answer, I believe, is very carefully, and without allowing ourselves to be rushed into a referendum which might be lost.

I have no doubt that the main prospect for doing so lies with Part III of the 2006 Act. In other words, for whatever time it takes, be it two, three, or even four or five years, we should concentrate on using Part III to its maximum effect. First, this would mean gaining more legislative authority for the Assembly by way of the 'salami slices' of jurisdiction. In this process the Welsh Assembly will become more confident about its prospects for achieving the status of a Parliament. Secondly, so far as the Welsh people are concerned, seeing power after power being transferred to Wales will have an incremental psychological impact. It will demonstrate that people from different parties are willing to discuss Welsh legislation in a constructive and reasonable way. It will also prove the Assembly's capacity to cooperate with other bodies in London. And as I have already

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The coalition government has agreed that a referendum should be held before May 2011, when the current four-year term of the Assembly comes to an end. I can appreciate the desire to hold a referendum at a fairly early date. Indeed, if it is delayed too long that in itself could be fatal to its prospects. On the other hand, if a referendum was to be held too early, and lost as a result, that would be a severe and crushing blow to Welsh nationhood.

said, the more Part III legislation is carried through the Assembly in Cardiff, the more Assembly Members will acquire experience and expertise in scrutinising legislation. This experience has to come from somewhere. It can only come from day to day application over time.

Of course, of great significance as well, is the setting up of the Convention under the chairmanship of that most distinguished of Welshmen, Sir Emyr Jones Parry. A broadly-based authoritative body such as the Convention can explain fairly and objectively to the people of Wales exactly what Part IV means and what its prospects are. We may thus be able to avoid a very great deal of confusion and misunderstanding. Much of the fate of the referendum in 1979 can be put down to the circumstances of the time, but in part it was also the result of misinformation deliberately sown by the enemies of Welsh devolution. That situation was greatly improved by the time we came to the referendum of 1997. Nonetheless, having an authoritative Convention with members of calibre can do nothing but good when the next referendum takes place.

There are other matters of considerable sensitivity to be considered. One is the Barnett Formula. Lord Barnett himself has said time and time again that it was never intended to be a comprehensive yardstick for the apportionment of public funds in the United Kingdom. Indeed, initially it was meant to be nothing more than a stop-gap measure. I have thought long and deeply about this dimension of devolution. When one looks at the share of expenditure that Wales has under a certain headings, it is possible to argue that we would have done better under a different formula. On the other hand, if one looks at the situation in the round, then it is inevitable that regions in England will say, "We too are poor and underprivileged; our case should be heard as much as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland." It could be that in those circumstances Wales would find itself in a worse financial position than at the moment. Therefore, my hope is that there will be no decision taken on a formula to replace Barnett before a referendum is held.

Another question is the number of members that the Assembly should have beyond the current 60. There seems to be a universal view that that is too small. Of the 22 Welsh county councils, all but six have a greater number of members than 60. A further argument is that the additional scrutiny required by Part III of the 2006 Act makes the case for more members, with an even stronger argument if Part IV comes into force.

The question of more members raises further issues. Should they be elected on the present two-tier system, with a majority of members elected directly on the first-past-the-post system, and the remainder on a regional list system? My own view is that there should be just one tier of representation, on the basis of the Single Transferable Vote PR system. In other words, every constituency would elect between three and five members by STV. At the same time, an overriding reality is that any change in this direction simply cannot take place before May 2011.

Above all, I believe it is essential that those who genuinely wish to see Wales proceed towards a parliament under Part IV should be careful not to give the impression to the Welsh public that the Government of Wales Act 2006 is deeply flawed. Of course, there are different views about the Act. Clearly, it is possible for it to be improved. For myself, however, I think it is nothing short of a miracle that we have such an Act on the statute book at all. It is the result of compromise, but nonetheless its beneficial possibilities are great indeed. Let us praise it, not bury it.

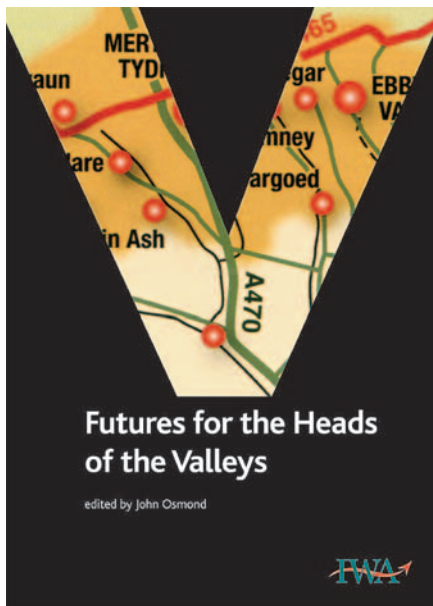
We have within our grasp an extraordinary opportunity of creating for Wales a constitutional status to provide the protective shell for that organic thing we call nationhood. It is right that we should look upon this opportunity in its historical context. Until recent years Wales had disappeared from the scene in constitutional terms for a very long time. That was the effect of the Statute of Rhuddlan of 1284 and the Act of Union of 1536, when the "dominion, principality and country of Wales", as far as the latter piece of legislation was concerned, was "annexed, incorporated and included in the greater realm of England".

It was only in 1964, with the establishment of the Welsh Office, that Wales emerged as a distinctive entity within the British constitution. We had a Secretary of State. Regions do not have secretaries of state. As a territorial entity the fact of Wales as a nation was acknowledged constitutionally and from 1964 to 1999 there were progressive increases in executive devolution to the Welsh Office. Since 1999 there has been a steady flow of devolution of executive authority from Whitehall to Cardiff Bay. Now, with the 2006 Act, we have the opportunity of moving to a full domestic Parliament.

Following the disastrous conclusion of the 1979 referendum we very nearly wrote off our chances of ever gaining a reasonable constitutional status for Wales. However, we lived to fight again through the referendum of 1997. We now have a blueprint for a Parliament set out in statute. One nation, and one nation alone, can prevent us from attaining that Parliament and that nation is Wales. Our responsibility for pursuing a balanced, Icarus-like route to make sure we gain the constitutional status our nation needs is truly immense.

Lord Elystan Morgan was Labour MP for Ceredigion from 1966 to 1974. A former Circuit Judge, he now sits as a cross-bencher in the House of Lords. This article is based on a presentation he made to an IWA and Cymru Yfory/Tomorrow's Wales seminar on devolution in Aberystwyth in April 2008.

'something special' for the Valleys



A democratically elected Mayor for the Valleys is the main recommendation in a new IWA study *Futures for the Heads of the Valleys*. Inspired by the success of the London Mayor, the study says the May 2008 elections "showed how a democratic post of this sort has the ability to enervise the political debate, and draw in candidates who can appeal to the electorate".

A Mayor would provide the Valleys with a political voice to ensure that its problems are moved higher up the political agenda, concludes the study.

In his contribution to the study Professor Steve Fothergill from the Centre for Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University and former Director of the Coalfields Campaign, says the Heads of the Valleys have "the most intractable problems of any older industrial area in the whole of Britain". While there are no "short cuts to regeneration" he calls for the injection of "something special".

The IWA report notes that powers acquired by the London Mayor's office have been devolved from central government rather transferred upwards from the local authorities and recommends that this should be followed in the Valleys. Existing local government across the Valleys would continue to carry out broadly its current range of functions, avoiding the necessity for a costly reorganisation.

Some powers invested in the Mayor of London, such as control of the police and fire and rescue services, would not be relevant to the Heads of the Valleys. But others most definitely would be, says the IWA study.

"Transport is regularly cited as one of the main constraints preventing individuals and businesses from reaching their full potential. It would be fully appropriate for the new Mayor to have responsibility, working with the relevant transport companies and consortia such as the South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA), for deciding on spending priorities.

The Valleys Mayor's transport commissioner, if he or she were to appoint one, might choose to work on better integration of bus services, support for new rail services, bus lanes and investment in new roads to better link outlying communities with the main spine roads. The transport commissioner would work with the Welsh Assembly Government's transport minister – and local authorities in the area – in developing the strategy but most importantly would make sure the Heads of the Valleys voice was heard when overall Wales transport strategies and funding were being decided.

Similarly, one could expect a skills commissioner appointed by the mayor to tackle the persistent problem of low educational attainment among the communities of the Heads of the Valleys. He or she would encourage schools and colleges to develop more fully the talents

of their students by spreading best practice, and would seek to ensure that educational institutions throughout the area were offering the courses needed to give Valleys young people the best chance of moving into well-paid and rewarding employment.

In health there is also a big job to be done, working alongside the National Health Service and local authorities' health services to improve the health of the population and to reduce the incidence of preventable causes, such as smoking, excess drinking, drug-taking and poor diet.

Another area where the mayor would have a major input would be strategic planning, as in London. The mayor would decide, for example, which settlements should or should not be expanded and where major new retail, commercial, industrial, housing, and leisure facilities should be placed.

The Mayor would also be responsible for drawing up a cultural and tourism strategy embracing the whole area and for seeking out new economic development. For instance, he or she would be likely to accompany Assembly Government Ministers on overseas trade visits to make the case for the Valleys and to support its exporters and other businesses."

Futures for the Heads of the Valleys is available from the IWA at £10 (£7.50 to IWA members) plus £1.50 P&P.

iwa trustee to head finance commission



IWA Trustee Gerald Holtham has been appointed to chair the Assembly Government's Commission on Funding and Finance, which will examine Whitehall's allocation of public expenditure to the National Assembly.

First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, said:

"There are few people as qualified to lead this review as Gerald Holtham who is one of the UK's leading financial experts and a passionate Welshman. His appointment marks a significant step forward in delivering one of

our key One Wales commitments."

As well as reviewing the Barnett Formula the Commission will examine the case for the Assembly acquiring tax varying and borrowing powers. There is also a requirement to develop a thorough and robust evidence base to ensure a well informed debate on the issues.

The Commission, which begins work in September, will submit a final report by the end of 2009 and is expected to work closely with the similar Calman

Commission in Scotland. Gerald Holtham was Director of the Institute of Public Policy Research and was a member of the OECD for 10 years where he was Head of the General Economics Division. He was also Chief Economist at Lehman Brothers and an ex-fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford. He is a member of Glas Cymru and serves on the Welsh Assembly Government's Economic Research Advisory Panel (ERAP). He was born in Aberdare and divides his time between his homes in London and Nantymoel.

health changes should impact on local government

The Assembly Government should acknowledge that its proposed changes to the NHS structure – combining the 22 Local Health Boards and the seven NHS Trusts into seven new authorities – have fundamental implications for the structure of local government. This is a major recommendation from the IWA and Academy Health Wales in their response to the consultation on the changes. In acknowledging the connection, the Assembly Government should start from the bottom-up, with the role of the smallest tier of local government, the community and town councils:

"At present there are some 700 of these councils across Wales, ranging from relatively large town councils, for

places like Barry, Rhyl, and Aberystwyth to relatively large rural councils, with very small populations, some of which are non-functioning. They have very few powers apart from an advisory role to the 22 County Councils.

"The Community Councils should be reduced in number so that their boundaries respond to real communities of interest, reducing the number to perhaps around 150.

The full response can be downloaded from www.iwa.org.uk (click on newsflash). Details of the second Academy Health Wales conference, Innovation in Health and Healthcare Delivery, to be held in Cardiff on November 10, can also be downloaded (click on Events).

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TRANSFORMATION NATION

Responding to Climate change

**Y Tabernacl
Machynlleth
19-20 September 2008**

Conference Chair: **Cynog Dafis**
Keynote Speakers
**George Monbiot, Sir John Houghton, Patrick Holden,
Mark Lynas, Morgan Parry and Pete Segger**

This conference will explore, in practical terms, the complex interactions between climate change and rural culture: from the global to the truly local.

What are the complex interactions between land-use, energy, food production, buildings, transport and waste management in combating climate change?
How can local communities take climate change issues more seriously and environmental activists seek a more profound understanding of local culture?
How can the uplands of Wales be harnessed in the battle to combat climate change at the same time as being a focus for our cultural heritage?
How can the Transition Towns initiative be rolled out across Wales?
What is the future role of the Centre for Alternative Technology?
Can the designation of the Dyfi Valley as Wales's first UNESCO Biosphere provide a fresh stimulus for local responses to climate change?
As an aspirant 'Transformation Nation' how can Wales mobilise its resources more effectively?

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Canolfan y Dechnoleg Amgen

'guard our inheritance'

James Griffiths pictured in his office in Cathays Park, Cardiff, in 1964, the year he became the first Secretary of State for Wales.

gwilym prys davies says promoting the welsh language is a key challenge facing the National Assembly

Some may have over-estimated what an elected Welsh Assembly with no power to enact primary legislation could achieve in terms of real benefit in standards of service to people. However, whatever our personal views may earlier have been about the 1998 Act which established the National Assembly, it is now clear that it has to a degree pulled Wales together. It has begun to restore the confidence of the Welsh people in their national identity. This is the Assembly's significant achievement to date.

Surveys conducted in England, Scotland and Wales during the last ten years show there has been a notable increase in the share of the public preferring an exclusively national identification – 'English', 'Scottish' or 'Welsh' – over their 'British' identity. This is one of the outstanding features of the last decade, and particularly so amongst people under the age of 35 in Scotland and Wales.

National identity is a difficult concept. The prime minister, Gordon Brown, has sought to identify 'Britishness' as the national identity of the people of Britain in terms of the major traditions of "individual liberties, civic engagement, fairness and decency to neighbours and the less fortunate." Many doubt whether this

goes to the core of the matter, for a number of reasons. "Individual liberties, fairness and decency" are elements that are also common to all strongly established western democracies, shaped and influenced by the values of the Christian Church going back over 1,500 years, and socialist principles over the past two centuries. Another reason is that a definition of national identity in such abstract terms excludes the importance the citizen attaches to heritage, language, culture, tradition, ideals and religion which have permeated minds and souls.

A surge of national consciousness in Wales has plainly occurred since the 1960s. It was reinforced by the constitutional settlement of 1998. It has also been, to a degree, an outcome of the political struggles of the past half century for the preservation of the national language and its culture, at a time when greater prosperity, social improvements and population movements became a serious threat to its survival.

Jim Griffiths was the most influential devolutionist in the Welsh Labour Movement in the last century. Without his vision and political skills I cannot see that the Labour Party would have taken the crucial and far-reaching decisions which it took in 1959 (the Welsh secretaryship) and in 1966 (the Welsh elected council) and which were to contribute to the 1998 settlement.

Griffiths wrote his last political essay *Welsh Politics in My Lifetime* in 1973. Reviewing the huge changes which had taken place in the economy, in society and in the Welsh political scene since he was a collier at Gwaith Isa'r Bettws in the anthracite coal-field, he considered that the growing Welsh language crisis had been a key factor accounting for Plaid Cymru's success, as

well as it being the beneficiary of a general resentment towards centralisation and uniformity. He summed up his message to Welsh Labour in the following terms:

"I feel that Labour has a duty to join with others in Wales to preserve our language and the culture that derives from it. To my comrades in Wales – who through the years have been so generous to me – my message is guard our inheritance."

This message still holds in today's global society. I have recently been reading an outstanding lecture on *Globalisation, Poverty and International Development: Insights from Centesimus Annus* by Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach, which he delivered last year in Rome and is published by the Acton Institute. Brian Griffiths has immense experience of banking and international finance and was an adviser to Margaret Thatcher at Number Ten in the early 1980s. He holds that globalisation has delivered enormous gains to humanity, but that it is accompanied by losses too. I am deeply grateful that he points out:

"Changing technology has led to changing work practices and changing life styles that are often markedly different to local tradition. English has emerged as the dominant language of globalisation but its increasing use poses a challenge for minority languages."

Hence, the destiny of minority languages cannot be left at the mercy of market forces. In Europe it needs strong government support supplemented by the European Commission and human-rights legislation.

I now turn to Peter Hain's recent pamphlet *Changing Wales: Changing Welsh Labour* published by the Labour thinktank Progress (www.progressonline.org). Hain was an innovative Welsh secretary of state at a key stage in the Welsh Assembly's history, and played a vital part in pushing forward the pace of Welsh devolution. He is still a very important figure who remains at the centre of affairs.

His essay is an analysis of the reasons for the sharp decline of the Welsh Labour vote in the 2007 Welsh Assembly election and the 2008 council elections showing "that the Welsh Tory vote leapt and Labour's fell again to its lowest level for a century". It goes on to demand "a Welsh Labour analysis and answer, not just a Westminster one".

I find myself in complete agreement with many of his uncomfortable findings. But his discussion of the Welsh language situation is disappointing and unhelpful. I am sure he means well for the language, though it would have been heartening to see some acknowledgment that he shares the conviction that the Welsh language is facing the crisis of its existence and that its defence should be amongst the Welsh government's top priorities.

The essay is pretty dismal, if not complacent, in its approach to the disproportionate movements of English-speaking immigrants inward, overwhelmingly from England and young Welsh speakers outward which are eroding the foundations of the ever dwindling communities which have been Welsh-speaking for centuries. Thus he can write:

"Wales, like much of Britain, is more cosmopolitan and diverse than ever in its history. There are now more people from England settling in Wales than there have ever been: one in five of the whole population and increasing by the day. This enriches Wales culturally, socially and economically."

He is aware of some of the damaging effects of this invasion. But I see nothing to suggest that he fully understands the concerns of those who fear its damaging long-term effects on the Welsh language. He is vague over the language issue. For example:

"... we must advance a positive vision for the language with a distinctive global perspective rather than the parochial one of Plaid and too many of their fellow traveller in Welsh public life."

What is meant by "positive vision for the language with a distinctive global perspective"? What changes are required to bring about this 'vision'? His charge of "parochialism" is extravagant and suggests that he is not able to forget old emotional tones. One notes that he does not list the needs of the Welsh language among the top "six key areas" where Welsh Labour needs to "prioritise" its policies. Does he support the demand for new legislation to close the many gaps in the Welsh Language Act 1993 (identified by Labour)? He discusses the needs of our Welsh universities, yet is silent on the issue of a Welsh-medium university. I wish he had offered practical recommendations around which language campaigners could rally to his cause.

I accept that language policies can raise questions which are potentially difficult. And I am bound to add that there is evidence of a vein of tension within Plaid Cymru over the priority it gives to the needs of the Welsh language by now. However, we have one reason for cautious optimism. The Welsh Assembly is no longer a dream, but a fact of life. Its Ministers are under a new statutory duty "to adopt a strategy to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language" and to report annually on its implementation. It is late in the day. But the Assembly brings great opportunities to design and implement robust policies to influence the destiny of the national language in today's global society.

It's a general truth that new ideas and breakthroughs normally come from outside government. Over the last twenty years or so the Institute of Welsh Affairs has led the way in influencing public opinion in so many key areas of Welsh life. I hope that it is not too much to ask that it now leads the way by undertaking the groundwork which is needed for the construction of a national effort, backed by public opinion, to ensure the survival of Welsh as the national language of Wales. Its survival is beyond any other issue, if Wales is to retain its native way of life.

*Lord Gwilym Prys Davies, a Labour Peer, was special adviser to John Morris, Secretary of State for Wales, between 1974-78. His book *Cynhaeaf Hanner Canrif* [The Harvest of Half a Century], which traces the history of Welsh language and devolution legislation between 1945 and 2006, has just been published by Gomer Press.*

referendum rules

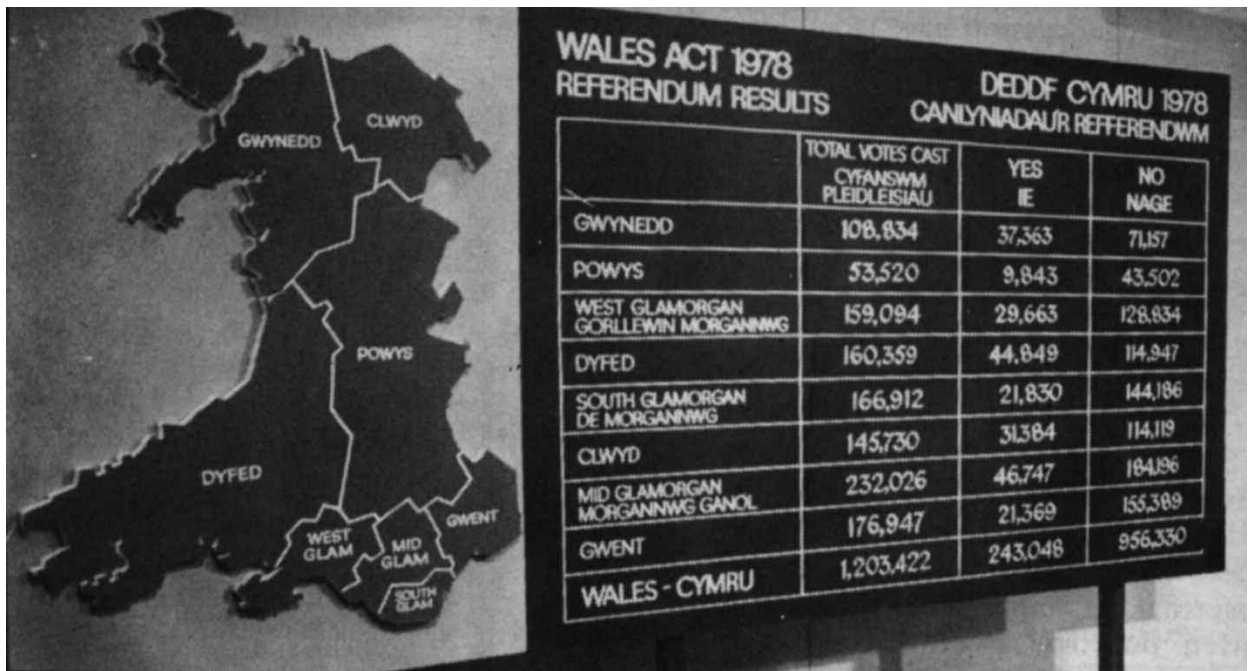
glyn mathias pre-empts the debate on how the forthcoming referendum on more powers for the Assembly should be organised

The referendum promised for Wales on greater powers for the National Assembly will be the tenth referendum held in the United Kingdom – unless we are beaten to it by the Scots, in which case it would be the eleventh. But amid all the tactical talk about when might be the best time to hold such a referendum, it has been little noticed that the rules governing referendums have changed. In other words, forget what you remember from back in 1997. It is going to be run differently next time.

The rules were changed in a little-noticed section of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which gave responsibility for the running of elections to the Electoral Commission. The Act gave the Commission a thoroughly mixed bag of things to do. It gave it purely advisory powers over the administration of elections, but – in marked contrast – it gave it statutory responsibility for managing referendums.

The Commission has already had one run round the referendum course, giving it the opportunity to try out its new responsibilities. That was the poll in the North-East of England in November 2004 on whether or not they wanted an elected regional assembly. It had been the intention of the Government, most specifically the intention of John Prescott, to hold referendums on a wider scale across other regions, primarily across the North of England. But the political warnings were clear, and all but the North-East of England were dropped. And even there, an over-confident Yes campaign was demolished by an overwhelming 78 per cent No vote.

The 1979 referendum results, as posted up by the returning officer, following the vote on 1 March that year.





A rare moment of unity: Dafydd Wigley, Peter Hain, Ron Davies, Win Griffiths, and Richard Livesey, raise their hands in celebration of the referendum result on the night of 18 September, 1997.

While any parallels with Wales are more of the 1979 variety, the key issues that the Electoral Commission had to deal with deserve careful study. One of the first requirements of the 2000 Act is that the Government must consult the Electoral Commission on the intelligibility of the proposed referendum question. And don't imagine this is purely a matter of form. The question as first presented to us for the North-East of England referendum was a ramshackle affair, complicated by the fact that voters in some areas were asked a second question about their preferred option for local government reorganisation.

The Commission had already drawn up guidelines for assessing the intelligibility of a referendum question, with the aim of assessing its "effectiveness in presenting the options clearly, simply and neutrally". The guidelines suggest that words and phrases in the question should not be leading or loaded, and not have positive or negative connotations. Consideration should also be given to the language used during any campaigning that might have taken place, and it should be clear what decision the voter is being asked to make.

You may think all that is pretty obvious. However, it is my view that the question put in the 1997 referendum in Wales would have failed the Commission's criteria. Then the electors were asked: "I agree that there should be a Welsh Assembly" or "I do not agree that there should be a Welsh Assembly," and were invited to put a cross against one or other of the boxes. The problem was that the campaign had been conducted in terms of Yes and No, and voters putting No in the negative box were effectively giving a double negative and saying Yes. The incidence

of this happening was sufficiently high on the night for counting officers to feel obliged to consult with the Chief Counting Officer, Professor Eric Sunderland, over what judgement to make on those ballot papers. The ruling was rightly made that whatever the literal effect, the intention of the voter was clear. At least some of the subsequent argument about spoilt ballot papers was down to the badly drafted question.

In the case of the North-East of England, the government accepted the Commission's advice and the question asked was: "Should there be an elected regional assembly for the North-East region?", with voters asked to answer Yes or No. So the simplest questions are the best. But how do you keep it simple? I can already foresee a debate about whether the word Assembly or Parliament should be used in the question next time in Wales.

To what extent is the Government obliged to listen to the Commission's views? The Secretary of State is obliged by the 2000 Act to lay a report containing the Commission's views before Parliament at Westminster and the First Minister must lay a copy before the Assembly. In practice, it is not politically possible for the Government to ignore the Commission's recommendations.

Possibly the most difficult judgement the Commission will have to make in a new Welsh referendum will be the decision as to which political parties or political groupings should become the official Yes and No campaigns. For this is now the responsibility of the Commission, and with it go a number of important entitlements.

First and foremost, each designated organisation would receive a grant (of equal amount, of course) which would be likely to be in the region of £100,000. That was the amount awarded in the North-East of England in 2004. In addition, the designated campaigning organisations would have the right to referendum broadcasts, the sending of referendum leaflets free of charge, free use of public rooms and generally much higher spending limits.

Now here is the catch. For obvious reasons, the Commission can only designate both a Yes and a No campaign, and cannot designate just on one side of the argument. Those who remember the 1997 campaign will immediately spot the potential issue here. There was then a well-prepared Yes campaign, and – by comparison – inchoate groupings on the No side. Indeed, such was the mismatch that the broadcasters were accused by Yes campaigners of inventing a No campaign in order to meet their own impartiality rules. Whilst nobody could have failed to be aware of the scale of anti-devolution feeling amongst the electorate, it was not represented by any coherent, large-scale body. In equivalent circumstances, it would have been difficult for the Commission to designate a No campaign.

So what is the process which the Commission has to follow? The first step is that any individual or body which wants to spend more than £10,000 campaigning has to register as what is called "a permitted participant". That would apply to political parties or anybody else who wants to get involved in the campaign. Any permitted participant, or combination of permitted participants, may apply to be designated as the official Yes or No campaigns. The Commission bases its decision on whichever applicants appear to them "to represent to the greatest extent those campaigning for the relevant outcome". In other words, the Commission would be looking for umbrella organisations, or, at the very least, parties or bodies which can demonstrate they have widespread support outside their own organisations.

In 2004 in the North-East of England, the decision to designate the Yes campaign was relatively straightforward (after more than one request to supply the relevant information). On the No side, it was more difficult, with one well-known campaigner feeling aggrieved at the result. The process, as set down in law, is not entirely satisfactory, and the Commission will be seeking some changes, not least to allow the campaign organisations, once designated, more time to use the resources they have been allocated.

There is a fall-back provision in the 2000 Act in the event of a failure to designate lead organisations on either side of the debate. The Commission itself has the residual power to publicise the arguments for and against the referendum question. Few would regard that as an adequate substitute for the real thing.

The Government of Wales Act makes provision for the referendum, but that still means that the rules governing the conduct of the referendum will have to be set out in secondary legislation. This Order in Council would specify the referendum period, the all-important referendum question, and which election rules apply.

There was a long-running argument in 2004 over the rights and wrongs of Government involvement in campaigning once the referendum period has begun. If the rules on campaign spending apply to everyone else, should they not also apply to the Government? The Welsh Assembly Government, for instance, may be the initiators of the referendum and be supporting a Yes vote, but at what point should they be forced to back off, stop issuing promotional material and leave it to those fighting the referendum under the rules laid down? Special pleading that the Government is only supplying public information and not really campaigning can wear a little thin.

In the North-East, it was finally agreed that there should be a moratorium on Government spending for the last 28 days before the poll. Next time around, this has to be sorted out at a much earlier stage.

The Commission will have the statutory responsibility for the conduct of the count. The Chief Counting Officer in a Welsh referendum would not be appointed by the Secretary of State for Wales, but would be the Chairman of the Electoral Commission or, more likely, someone appointed by him. It would be open to the Commission to appoint a senior returning officer from Wales as the Chief Counting Officer, as happened in the North-East of England.

There has been quite a lot of discussion about the most propitious time to hold a referendum on primary legislative powers for the Assembly. In reality, there is not a lot of room for manoeuvre.

The All-Wales Convention, chaired by Sir Emyr Jones Parry, is due to report by the end of 2009. Thereafter, the Assembly has to vote in favour of a referendum by a majority of two thirds or more. Then the Order in Council has to be drafted, agreed to by the Secretary of State for Wales and approved by the Privy Council. Such processes always take longer than predicted, and a Westminster General Election is likely to be held in the middle of all that, probably in Spring 2010. It is therefore likely that the earliest realistic date for any referendum would be the autumn of 2010.

There might be a temptation to combine the referendum with the elections to the Assembly in May 2011, but the Electoral Commission has made it clear they would oppose such a combination. The issues at stake in an election for seats in the Assembly would be far more wide-ranging than the issue at stake in a referendum. To combine elections with a referendum could leave the electorate very confused.

Glyn Mathias was a Member of the Electoral Commission from 2001 to 2008. He was previously Political Editor for both ITN and BBC Wales. He is currently a member of Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Wales.

making votes count

annabelle harle
on a new effort to ensure
the Welsh political cake is
sliced up more fairly

Spring sunshine through the glass-walled Senedd fell on a sizeable crowd gathered to welcome a newcomer to the Welsh political scene and to diminish a garishly-decorated cake. The cake was summoned as a visual aid, unfairly sliced to illustrate the lack of correlation between votes cast and seats won under First-Past-The-Post. The newcomer, its activities in Wales hitherto fairly recondite and confined to post-election reports, is the new Wales office of the Electoral Reform Society.

The Electoral Reform Society is known the world over not only for its own campaigning and electoral work, but also for the work of its much-respected sister organisation Electoral Reform Services, the provider of choice for ballots and elections for very many bodies. Solidly based in London for over a century, post-devolution the Society resolved to establish campaign offices in first Scotland and then Wales. A member-led organisation, it has as its principal aim the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system for all elections. Alongside this aim is the desire for wider participation, a strengthening of democracy and involvement in decision-making of all those affected by it.

'An element of proportionality' was famously introduced to Wales and Scotland by the devolution settlements. Forms of the Additional Member System (AMS) method of election, where one section of members are elected by First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and another by a form of proportional representation (PR), are used for both the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. The two systems differ in the ratio of FPTP to PR members, which is greater in Wales than in Scotland, and in the number of list members per region, which is greater in Scotland than in Wales. These differences make the Scottish system both more proportional and more accessible to small parties. Many groups, including Welsh Labour Action, of which I was a member, called for full STV to be used for the Assembly from the start. This was also one of the recommendations of the Richard Commission in 2004, whereas a majority of the Sunderland Commission in 2002 recommended its introduction for local elections.

The Electoral Reform Society includes members from all parties and none. Politically-minded people who are not party-affiliated often favour STV since it restores power to the voter and diminishes the power of the parties. Many party members also espouse STV as producing a result which most closely mirrors the wishes of the electorate, notwithstanding the effect its introduction might have on their own party's ranking.

Liberal Democrat AM Jenny Randerson and Plaid Cymru AM Helen Mary Jones cut a symbolic cake at the opening of the Electoral Reform Society's new Wales office in Cardiff Bay in May 2007.



STV can certainly be argued to be the fairest method of election. However, it is perceived as complex: the voter ranks the candidates by order of preference, and counting can be exhaustive. First-Past-The-Post is often described as being a flawed rough-and-ready system, but one everyone understands. Yet, can we be satisfied with second best in an epoch when the populace often refuses to be the electorate, voting only with feet that carry it to anywhere but the polls?

The introduction of STV in Scotland for the 2007 local authority elections, considered separately from the technical difficulties with the AMS vote which arose at the ballot, was a definite success. Seats were allocated in proportion to votes cast, and the phenomenon of the unopposed nomination, which angered many in Wales this April when they learnt they did not have any choice to make on 1 May as only one candidate was standing, disappeared. In his report on the elections Lewis Baston, the Electoral Reform Society's Director of Research, concluded:

- Scotland now has councils that much better reflect the spread of views in their electorates.
- No longer are there councils so dominated by a particular party group that opposition is rendered quite ineffective.
- More parties are working together to provide good local governance.
- More of the electorate have found that people they voted for have become councillors.
- Unlike the Scottish Parliament elections, held on the same day, relatively few problems were encountered in making the change to STV.

The Society's report on this year's Welsh unitary authority elections draws lessons from the Scottish experience: 75 per cent of people in Scotland now have as a councillor someone from their first choice party. On the other hand, in Wales only 34 per cent saw someone from their favourite party elected to represent them. The report also demonstrates the odd results that can be brought about by FPTP. For example, looking at the votes cast in Cardiff, the Conservatives came from third place to

win a narrow victory with 27.5 per cent, Labour came second with 27 per cent, the Liberal Democrats third with 26.2 per cent, and Plaid fourth with 12.6 per cent. However, the results, in terms of seats won, gave the Liberal Democrats 35, the Conservatives 17, Labour 13 and Plaid 7. The ensuing Liberal Democrat-Plaid coalition was an alliance of the two parties who came third and fourth in the popular vote – see Table 1.

How did this happen? The Conservatives had a more consistent, evenly-spread support base and polled reasonably well in most Cardiff wards. The same applied to Labour. However, the Lib Dems had areas with fairly low support and some smaller areas with a concentrated level of support. With these clusters of support, the Lib Dems were able to poll fewer votes but win the most seats. It is an injustice of the voting system that the more widespread, geographically, a party's support is, the worse it will do under FPTP. A similar distortion of the vote share also disadvantaged Labour in Merthyr – see Table 2.

In Merthyr in 2004 Labour benefited from FPTP's tendency to favour parties with concentrated support bases, winning a majority of seats (51.5 per cent) with a minority of votes (41.5 per cent). However, in 2008 the party's seat tally fell by a half, to just 8 while its overall share of the vote held up relatively well. In a fairer voting system, Labour's seat total would certainly have fallen, but not nearly to the same degree. Labour will now appreciate that its disappointing 2004 result in this former stronghold had tested the strength of FPTP to unfairly reward the largest party (by exaggerating its share of the seats) to breaking point. The further fall in its vote share in 2008 – from 41.5 per cent to 37.1 per cent – was enough to see it unfairly punished by the system: less than a quarter of the seats with well over a third of the votes.

STV opponents often claim that it "leads to coalitions". But, as we can see, coalitions are with us already. Since the May 2008 elections there are coalitions in place in eighteen of our twenty-two unitary authorities, as well as at the Senedd. And, in any event, what is wrong with coalitions? The great political

table 1: Cardiff local election results – 2008 and 2004 compared

	Conservative		Labour		Lib Dem		Plaid		Independents		Others	
	% share		% share		% share		% share		% share		% share	
	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats
2008	27.5	22.7	27.0	17.3	26.2	46.7	12.6	9.3	4.6	4.0	0.6	0.0
Seats won	17		13		35		7		3		0	
2004	20.7	13.3	29.8	36.0	32.7	42.7	12.9	5.3	1.5	2.7	1.8	0.0
Seats won	10		27		32		4		2		0	

table 2: Merthyr local election results – 2008 and 2004 compared

	Conservative		Labour		Lib Dem		Plaid		Independents		Others	
	% share		% share		% share		% share		% share		% share	
	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats	votes	seats
2008	0	0	37.1	24.2	18.2	18.2	2.3	0	35.9	57.6	6.5	0.0
Seats won	0		8		6		0		19		0	
2004	0	0	41.5	51.5	1.0	0	5.1	0	22.5	48.5	29.9	0.0
Seats won	0		17		0		0		16		0	



Electoral Reform Society activists at the launch of their Wales office (left to right): Dr Ken Ritchie, Chief Executive; Annabelle Harle, Head of Office (Wales); Katy Wright, Parliamentary Officer; Hywel Nelson, Research Officer (Wales); Ben Rawlings, X-Change Coordinator (Youth and Student Campaigns); and Owain ap Gareth, Campaign Officer (Wales).

failure of our days is apathy, disconnection, disaffection, lack of engagement, call it what we will. Newsreel shots from abroad of voters queuing for days outside polling stations, even risking life and limb to cast their vote, reveal a greater devotion to the exercise of the citizen's part of the bargain with government than has existed for many years at home.

We have other diversions and preoccupations, have forgotten that our grandparents fought for equal voting rights for women and achieved them eighty short years ago. It is heartbreaking that so many people say they will not vote because it has nothing to do with them, that politics doesn't affect them, that politicians are all the same. Despite our immersion in communications, we have lost the ability to sift information and retain what we need. Bombarded with fact and opinion we lose sight of the knowledge which remains essential.

The presence of citizenship on the school curriculum, the introduction of school councils, the proliferation of web-based discussion networks, the Assembly's own excellent education service, provide the climate for a new democracy in Wales. The Electoral Reform Society hopes to develop educational resources to assist teachers in re-drawing the connections between history, politics, government and life as it is lived. We hope to facilitate debate on voting systems, on devolution, Votes at 16, indeed on anything that people feel is relevant to them and worth talking about. We aim to build links in the wider community and develop resources of interest to all

community groups, with a view to re-establishing the tradition of participation in the democratic process and strengthening the legitimacy of government by increasing turnout.

"My Nan would never forgive me if I didn't vote" was a remark frequently heard twenty years ago. Yet as the memory fades of the grandmothers whose own mothers were the first women to achieve the vote, who is to remind us of the duty to hold up our side of the democratic bargain? We do not make any claim to be the answer to that question. However, if we can contribute to the debate and assist in re-establishing a passion for politics as one of the great Welsh sporting activities, our efforts will have been rewarded.

Annabelle Harle is the Head of the Electoral Reform Society's Wales Office. The Society's Report on the 2008 Welsh unitary authority elections can be found on its website, www.electoral-reform.org.uk, or may be obtained in hard copy from the society at: Regus House, Falcon Drive, Cardiff CF10 4RU.

Craig Cwareli escarpment at Cwm Cwareli, to the east of Penyfan in the central Brecon Beacons.



Photo Paul Sambrook www.trynor.net

countryside democracy

kirsty williams says members of the national parks should be elected

the Welsh National Park Authorities have a tough task. Their landscapes must balance environmental priorities with the needs of rural communities. Conservation is not enough. We need a living countryside, with thriving local economies.

Sustainable development can only be achieved when the parks are economically and socially as well as environmentally effective. Responsibility for making this happen should rest with elected and accountable representatives. Instead it is in the hands of appointees. This is an intolerable democratic deficit which I hope to address by seeking legislative powers for the National Assembly to ensure that members of our three National Parks in Wales are directly elected.

Current legislation provides for two thirds of members of the National Parks to be appointed by the constituent local authorities, and one third by the Assembly Government. Sitting on the three Welsh Park Authorities' boards are 57 appointees: 38 councillors nominated by their local authorities and 19 Assembly Government appointees.

So long as they are appointed rather than not elected these members will fail to provide a direct link between the residents of the parks and their Authorities. Direct elections would promote local accountability and enhance the legitimacy of Park decisions.

There is no difference between the level of accountability of councillors assessing a planning application in inner-city Cardiff to those assessing planning applications in the Brecon Beacons. If people are unhappy with the service being delivered, they should have the final say via the ballot box. There is no reasonable argument why this principle should be different in different parts of the country.

Since Scotland made its late entrance to the national park family in 2003, it has made a huge contribution to the development of the purpose of national parks. In part this has come about because a minimum of 20 per cent of their members are directly elected. In the elections a large number of candidates put

themselves forward and there was a high turnout at the ballot box. In the first election for Cairngorms National Park Authority, for instance, there was an exceptional turnout of 60 per cent.

In 2003 a review of the Welsh National Park Authorities recommended that the Assembly Government should consult on the possibility of one fifth of their members being directly elected or appointed via a collegiate system involving the community councils. At that time the Minister responsible, Carwyn Jones, took an 'all or nothing' approach, suggesting that either all members should be directly elected or none at all. The subsequent consultation found against direct elections. However that was criticised by a number of stakeholders who questioned the range of consultees and how the questions were framed.

An argument recurrently used against direct elections is that they will create an authority unnecessarily embroiled in party political decisions and affairs. But this has not been the experience in Scotland and there is no reason why the position in Wales should be any different. Another argument is that elections are expensive. However, no price should be put on democracy, and in any event elections could be held as part of the cycle of local government elections at a minimal extra cost.

As things stand, although the Assembly Government already has the power to appoint members to National Park Authorities in Wales, it does not have the powers to change the rules relating to whether they should be directly elected. Consequently, I have submitted a Legislative Competence Order to the Members ballot calling for powers relating to the issues of National Parks to be devolved to Wales.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Management Plan has an admirable mission statement. It declares that it should the Park should be:

"...a partnership of all those who live and work in, enjoy or care for the Brecon Beacons National Park to conserve its beauty, character and tranquillity, its natural and cultural heritage and its way of life, both for their own sakes and in order that the Park may continue to be a source of inspiration and enjoyment for all".

My mission is to make these aspirations a reality by realising the accountability that comes with direct and democratic elections for National Park representatives.

Kirsty Williams is Liberal Democrat AM for Brecon and Radnor.

blogosphere

peter black probes the future relationship between Welsh politics and the internet

If you are reading this article thinking that I am going to herald the advent of blogs as a new political Camelot then you have come to wrong place. Blogs are a communication tool in the same way as any other. Like television, radio, and the dead tree press it is how you use them that counts rather than what you say on them. On their own they do not reach a wide enough audience to make any substantial difference. However, when combined with other media they can be used to devastating effect.

There is no denying that the internet has the potential to change the way that politicians do their job. More importantly, it can open up the commentariat to ordinary people. But, as with every other innovation, it will only succeed if it is used and read. Will politicians and the citizens they represent embrace this new technology?

In many ways blogs are just the vanguard of a more interesting phenomena, the rise of new media. This is a development that does offer the promise to transform our lives by changing the way that we access news and entertainment at home, making it more interactive, more accessible and offering the opportunity to localise and personalise content. If anything will change the way that politicians interact with voters then this will. It may even alter the way that we are governed by transforming our representative democracy into one where direct voter interaction influences the decision making process as it takes place.

Whatever is said I do not believe that the vast majority of people access news and current affairs through the web. They use it to supplement other sources and to catch up with developments. The advent of digital television offers greater choice but it also means that the golden age of public service television is coming to an end. The opportunity is there for people to create their own channels and their own content on-line with the development of local television channels. Already some regional newspapers are using their websites to screen videos offering a new angle on more traditionally reported stories. People can comment on articles on-line and have their views printed in the next day's newspaper. Consumers can also vote in quick on-line polls on the issues of the day. That type of service is likely to grow.

Fortunately for the future of representative democracy, on-line polls and direct voting on issues remain scientifically unreliable and open to abuse. Nevertheless as they become more sophisticated and more widely used, these tools can be used by those well-versed in the manipulation of more traditional media to influence debate and by implication the process of government itself.

Faced with a newspaper poll showing overwhelming opposition to a school closure programme and which is backed up with

blogging attitudes

- *"I think bloggers speak only to other bloggers."*
Karen Sinclair AM, Labour, Clwyd South
- *"Blogs written by politicians with irony, anger or humour may, months later, have lost all relevant context and appear instead to be spiteful and thoughtless."*
Jocelyn Davies AM, Plaid, South Wales East
- *"Blogs are only an effective tool for misinforming voters, allowing bloggers to misrepresent themselves and their victims."*
Mark Isherwood AM, Conservative, North Wales
- *"Blogs appear to be used by a disproportionately large number of headbangers and people without a life. I don't read or write blogs. I do other things."*
John Marek, former Independent AM for Wrexham
- *"I have never found one that is interesting enough to look for a repeat."*
Janet Davies, former Plaid AM, South Wales West
- *"First thoughts are not always your best thoughts and most political bloggers feel obliged to be controversial for its own sake."*
Jenny Randerson AM, Liberal Democrat, Cardiff Central
- *"Emails take up at least half of my working life and I don't how I'd manage to keep up with a blog."*
Lorraine Barrett AM, Labour Cardiff South and Penarth



In his bid for the Presidency Barack Obama has made effective use of the Internet, raising millions of dollars in small donations via his website www.barackobama.com

letters and petitions, what local politician will not back down in some way and seek a more acceptable compromise? It is still the case that it is when new media is used in association with more traditional campaigning methods that it is most effective rather than standing on its own two feet.

Tools are being devised and used that do enable direct participation by people in the democratic process. In many ways these are just on-line versions of existing tools but their accessibility means that it has never been easier to be an armchair activist and actually make a difference. The Welsh Assembly for example has recently launched Senedd.tv, which enables users to watch live sessions or archive footage in high quality on their home or work computers. What is more this footage is searchable so you can single out the contributions of a particular AM or watch a specific debate.

The Assembly also has an e-petition site, which unlike petitions on 10 Downing Street's website, enables citizens to produce petitions on-line that will feed into the Assembly's committee process and be considered by AMs. Petitions may be referred to a scrutiny committee or a Minister for action, the petitions committee itself may take evidence on it or it could be passed directly to Plenary for debate.

An example of how this works is the recent petition calling for the Assembly Government to adopt a system of presumed consent for organ donation. Although this was not an on-line petition its course through the process will be very similar. The petition was referred to the Health and Local Government Committee, which initiated an enquiry and put a forum on the Assembly's website seeking contributions from interested parties. It is the intention to make much more use of forums on the website in future and to allow interested parties to initiate their own threads.

In the USA the use of the internet for political campaigning is widespread. Candidates produce on-line videos, which are widely watched. Websites are set up to provide minute by minute news on what the candidate is doing, including his or her own blog and these are supplemented by blogs written by members of the campaign team. Many of these sites are used to solicit a large number of small individual donations.

The key to this is the reach of the candidate's on-line presence. According to Barack Obama's official website for example, 280,000 people have created accounts on BarackObama.com. From those on-line accounts, 6,500 grass root volunteer groups have been created and more than 13,000 off-line events organised through the site. More than 370,000 individual online

donations have been made, more than half of which are for less than \$25. In addition supporters have set up their own personal fundraising pages to proactively recruit their social network to donate to the campaign. These pages have raised over \$1.5m.

The extent of Obama's website fund raising activity is shown in the adjoining panel. It is unlikely that this could ever be replicated in the United Kingdom, though it will not be through want of trying on the part of the political parties. Our politics are not so personality based, our internet sites do not have the same reach, our political culture has never encouraged self-starters to work in this way. Indeed, the closed nature of the membership of our parties tends to discourage the sort of spontaneity that has characterised much of Obama's efforts.

We have had much more success with sites such as www.justgiving.com that enables charities to raise money on-line, than we have setting up similar efforts on the part of candidates. Most parties tend to use their on-line presence to trawl for members and supporters, whilst concentrating their e-fundraising efforts at existing members and donors.

Having said this, it is the case that the use of on-line media by politicians and their parties is growing. Many are experimenting with internet-based party political broadcasts and occasional videos to add interest to otherwise dry content. Others are setting up specific campaign sites to advance a cause or to monitor the work of government. For example, Home Office Watch (www.homeofficewatch.com) is essentially a blog that acts as a resource for those seeking to gather ammunition to throw at the government on civil liberty issues and the like.

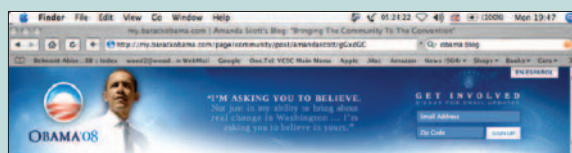
Steve Webb, Liberal Democrat MP for Northavon in Gloucestershire, has an e-mail group with thousands of members who he regularly consults on a wide range of issues. He posts the results of surveys on his website, which can be found at <http://www.stevewebb.org.uk/>. He also has a blog.

Tools have emerged that enable individual party members and activists to easily set up petition sites and polls, to customise their own sites and toolbars and to take advantage of on-line advertising to raise money for the party. It remains the case though that the best way to maximise the impact of one's online presence is to use it to exploit more traditional and more widely viewed media.

A good example of this was the on-line party political broadcast produced by the Wales Labour Party prior to the 2007 Assembly elections. Entitled 'Remember the Tory years' it was billed as too controversial for television and posted on YouTube instead at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHRTLp960Cg>. To date it has had 12,275 views, many of which were generated by the initial burst of publicity for it in the press.

A better example of how a blog has been used to influence the political agenda is the way that Plaid Cymru MP Adam Price used his on-line presence (<http://www.adampriceblog.org.uk/>) to start a debate within his party and the wider media about the sort of coalition Plaid should be seeking in the Welsh Assembly. The timing of his post was right, at about the time

barackobama.com



- At the end of the primaries Obama had \$38m cash in hand for the remaining campaign (Hillary Clinton had \$6m and debts of \$10m).
- In April 2008 Obama's campaign raised \$31m (£15.8m) – 94 per cent in sums of \$20 or less.
- In February 2008 Obama's campaign raised \$55m – \$45m over the internet – without the candidate himself hosting a single fundraiser.
- Everyone who wanted to get into Obama's final 75,000-strong rally of the primaries in Portland, Oregon, at the end of May 2008 had to provide an e-mail address.
- Obama's most famous web videos have not been commissioned by the candidate himself – they have all been created and disseminated spontaneously on-line.
- One of the men Obama hired to establish his fundraising operation was Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, the social networking website.

that talks with the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Tories were floundering, and his views led directly to Rhodri Morgan contacting the Plaid leadership and the formation of the One Wales' Government.

There are many other examples of Welsh politicians using their blogs to generate debate or to get a point across in the wider media, though none so successful as Adam Price. Nevertheless, the use of new media by Assembly Members and Welsh MPs remains the exception rather than the rule. Many have a Facebook page or use MySpace but few use it themselves or in a way that might involve more people in their activities. Most view blogs with suspicion or fear.

An article by BBC journalist and former blogger, Ciaran Jenkins, at the Cardiff School of Journalism website (<http://journalism.cf.ac.uk/2007/online/index.php?id=parse-195-0-0-251&article=463>) deals with this issue far more comprehensively and with greater insight than I am able to muster. What Ciaran's article reveals is an anti-blogging trend amongst some politicians, who view the medium with suspicion and would rather it went away. He reports that in total 12 AMs keep a blog, while the other 48 are fairly sceptical about the concept (see 'Blogging Attitudes' panel on page 19). Asked if blogging was an effective tool for communicating with voters, 38 per cent agreed, but 32 per cent did not, with the remainder unsure.

Alas, since the article was written in December 2006 the dozen has dwindled to six, whilst I am aware of only four Welsh MPs who blog and one of those has not posted for nearly a year. I don't understand why so many AMs are hostile to blogging. Politicians put a lot of material out to the public all of which is open to misinterpretation



peter black's top Welsh blogs

Politicians

- Leighton Andrews AM <http://www.leightonandrews.com/>
- Peter Black AM <http://peterblack.blogspot.com/>
- Glyn Davies <http://www.glyndaviesam.blogspot.com/>
- Paul Flynn MP <http://paulflynnmp.typepad.com/>
- Bethan Jenkins AM <http://bethanjenkins.blogspot.com/>
- David Jones MP <http://davidjonesclwydwest.blogspot.com/index.html>
- Huw Lewis AM <http://www.huwlewis.org.uk/>

Journalists

- Clive Betts <http://cambriapolitico.com/>
- Tom Bodden <http://goginthebay.northwalesblogs.co.uk/>
- David Cornock <http://davidcornock.blogspot.com/>
- Betsan Powys <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/betsanpowys/>
- Vaughan Roderick <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/cymraeg/>
- Matt Withers <http://mattwithers.welshblogs.co.uk/>

Commentators

- Ceredig <http://ceredig.blogspot.com/>
- The Cynical Dragon <http://thecynicaldragon.blogspot.com/>
- Guerrilla Welsh-fare <http://guerrilla-welsh-fare.blogspot.com/>
- Dylan Jones-Evans <http://www.dylanje.blogspot.com/index.html>
- Normal Mouth <http://normalmouth.blogspot.com/>
- Ordovicius <http://this-is-sparta.blogspot.com/>
- Valleys Mam <http://merchmerthyr.blogspot.com/>
- Miss Wagstaff <http://onewalesgovernment.blogspot.com/>
- Matt Wardman <http://www.mattwardman.com/>
- Marcus Warner <http://southpawgrammarwales.blogspot.com/>
- Welsh Ramblings <http://welshramblings.blogspot.com/index.html>

and can be twisted against them. Whether it is speeches, articles, press releases or just the occasional comment on-line, we have seen opponents swoop with glee on any mistake and use it to their own advantage. The risks involved with blogging are much the same but the benefits are great too. Why would any politician turn down the chance to get their views across unedited to hundreds of people each day?

I blog for a number of reasons, but mainly because I enjoy it. I persist with it because I believe that it is my duty as a politician to engage with the wider electorate in whatever way I can. I am able to use my blog as a campaigning archive, to pursue themes over a period of time and to debate with those who wish to comment on the posts. I have used it to generate news stories in the dead tree press. I have also made use of the opportunities it provides to advance internal debates within the party as well.

My blog reflects my interests, which are often wider than the narrowly political. I try to make it entertaining and occasionally witty because otherwise nobody would read it. Yes, it is an ego trip but it is one embarked on for good reasons and sound political motives and as such I believe it is a justifiable journey.

The statistics for who reads my blog are available via a link on the site for anybody to read. On average I will get 200 plus people visiting the site each day and between 350 and 400 hits. It is difficult to pin down who actually reads it, but a fair guess would say other politicians, journalists and some ordinary people who have an interest in political matters.

Despite the reluctance of many Welsh politicians to get involved, the blog scene itself is very healthy as is evident from blog aggregator sites such as Welsh Political News found at <http://www.politics-wales.co.uk/>. As well as politicians we also get blogs by journalists, sometimes writing on behalf of their media outlet, sometimes in a personal capacity. Many bloggers are members of political parties but not elected politicians whilst others do not write about politics at all. Some, such as Richard Brunstrom, are senior police officers.

The consensus is that it is a lively but challenging community in which vigorous debate takes place about the many issues facing Wales and its government. Between them they add to the sense of debate about the country and its future, something that is missing on the mainstream media.

The new media may be revolutionising the way we fight elections and pursue our politics but it is the blogosphere that is hosting the necessary discussions on how we make the most of our new devolved democracy. What is more, these conversations are open to all. Visit and read, comment and respond, or go to www.blogger.com and start your own blog. There really is a welcome for all in the virtual valleys and hillsides of Wales, no matter what language you wish to write in.

Peter Black is the Welsh Liberal Democrat Assembly Member for South Wales West. He blogs at www.peterblack.blogspot.com

German intellectual Jürgen Habermas is one of the world's leading philosophers.



Jürgen Habermas says that now Ireland has rejected the Lisbon Treaty, it is time for the politicians to turn the EU's future over to the people

Europe's future



European governments are at their wits' end. It is time for them to admit it, and let the public decide about the future of the European Union. The farmers are upset about falling global prices and the new regulations constantly coming from Brussels. Those at the bottom of the social ladder are upset about the growing gap between rich and poor, especially evident in a country where both groups live in close proximity. The citizens despise their own politicians, who promise the world but who lack perspective and do not (or cannot) deliver. With Ireland's No vote, it might be time for the European Union to make some changes.

And then along comes a referendum over a treaty that is too complicated to be understood. EU membership has been more or less advantageous. Why should anything be changed? Doesn't the strengthening of European institutions necessarily

The European Parliament in Strasbourg – a vital part of building a more democratic European Union. Should it, for example, be empowered to elect the president of the Council of Ministers?



lead to a weakening of democratic voices, which are only heard within the national public sphere?

The citizens sense that they are being patronised. Once again, they are to ratify something in the making of which they were not involved. The government has said that this time the referendum will not be repeated until the people give in. And aren't the Irish, this small, obstinate people, the only ones in all of Europe who are actually being asked for their opinions?

They don't want to be treated like cattle being driven to the voting booth. With the exception of three members of parliament who voted 'no' on the issue, the Irish people and the entire Irish political class are entirely at odds. In a sense, it is also a referendum over politics in general, making it all the more tempting to send 'politics' a message. This temptation is one felt everywhere today.

One can only speculate on the motives behind the Irish 'no' vote. But the first official reactions have been clear. Suddenly roused out of complacency, European governments don't want to appear helpless. They are looking for a 'technical' solution – which would result in a repeat of the Irish referendum.

This, though, is little more than unadulterated cynicism on the part of the decision-makers, especially given their protestations of respect for the electorate. It is also wind in the sails of those actively wondering whether semi-authoritarian forms of pseudo-democracy practiced elsewhere are perhaps more effective after all. The purpose of the Lisbon Treaty was to finally achieve the organisational reform intended, but not completed, by the 2001 European Summit in Nice. That summit took place before the European Union's membership was expanded from 15 member states to 27. In the mean time, the eastward expansion, with the broadened prosperity gap and increased diversity of interests, has led to an even greater need for integration.

These new conflicts and tensions cannot be addressed by European governing bodies in the manner to which they have become accustomed. After the failure of the proposed European constitution in 2005, the Lisbon Treaty represented a bureaucratically negotiated compromise to be pushed through behind the backs of the citizenry. With this most

recent tour de force, European governments have callously demonstrated that they alone are shaping Europe's future. There remained only that one tiresome exception mandated by the Irish constitution.

The treaty itself was little more than a stalling response to the shock of 2005's failure. The ratification process came to a halt in France and the Netherlands before it could even reach the real hurdle in Great Britain. The predicament is even worse today. Business as usual? Or is it perhaps time to realise that, for European unity to deepen, Brussels must shift to a more participatory style of democracy.

Until Nice, the integration process, fuelled by economic liberalism, was pursued by the élites over the heads of the population. But since then, the successes of economic dynamism are increasingly perceived as a zero-sum game. There are more and more losers across Europe.

Justifiable socio-economic fears and consequent short-sighted reactions may explain the unstable mood. But the public's frame of mind can be influenced by political parties – by offering the electorate a credible vision. Unsolved problems should be taken more seriously than transient states of feeling.

The failed referendums are a signal that the élitist mode of European unification is, thanks to its own success, reaching its limits. These limits can only be surmounted if the pro-European élites stop excusing themselves from the principle of representation and shed their fears of contact with the electorate. The divide between the political decision-making authority granted to the EU in Brussels and Strasbourg on the one hand, and the nation state-bound opportunities provided by participatory democracy on the other, has become too large.

This is all the more awkward because competencies are unevenly distributed between the national governments and the super-national level. The sociopolitical and cultural side-effects of the welcomed market freedoms implemented across Europe are being passed on to the individual countries, which in turn are denied access to the conditions under which these external costs arose in the first place.

The upshot is that lost political leverage can only be regained at the European level. Only then can Jacques Delors' now-faded vision of a "social Europe" become the subject of meaningful political controversy.

A body politic cannot be designed such that the very act of its creation excludes alternatives to the prevailing market liberalism. However, the question of cautious harmonisation of tax and economic policy and the gradual assimilation of social security systems within the EU touches on the contentious issues of deepening and widening that have crippled the union for years.

The governments' embarrassed silence over Europe's future conceals the fundamental conflict raging over the bloc's direction, a debate which robs European unification of its vision and appeal. Should Europe become a pro-active force, shaping policy at home and playing a greater role abroad? Or should its role focus more on ongoing expansion, thus encouraging improvements within neighbouring countries that seek to join?

The price of this diffuse expansion project is a lack of political leverage in a global society that, while economically tightly knit, has been drifting apart politically since 2001. One only has to look at the miserable images of petty princes Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel, as they kowtow to US President George W. Bush, to realise that Europe is bidding adieu to the world stage.

But the problems of climate change, the extreme gaps between rich and poor, the global economic order, the violation of fundamental human rights and the struggle over dwindling energy resources affect everyone equally. Even as the world becomes increasingly interdependent, the global political stage is home to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and an increased willingness to turn to violence. Isn't it in the interest of a politically strong Europe to push for the constitutionalisation of international law and an effective cooperation of the international community?

Europe, though, is unable to achieve political significance commensurate with its economic importance, precisely because its governments disagree over the purpose of European unification. Where the blame lies is clear. First and foremost, it can be pinned on the fact that governments themselves are at a loss – and are thus spreading the malaise of a lackadaisical and morose 'more of the same' attitude.

Naturally, the fundamental conflict over direction derives its explosive force from deeper-seated, historically-rooted differences. There are not grounds for criticism of any particular country. But in the wake of the Irish signal, we should expect two things from our governments. They must admit that they are at their wits' end. And they cannot continue to suppress their crippling dissent. In the end, they are left with no choice but to allow the peoples to decide for themselves.

This means that politicians have to roll up their sleeves to ensure that Europe becomes a critical topic of debate across the continent. Should a Europe that has regressed to nation

state bickering transform itself into an entity capable of action on both a domestic and international scale?

One proposal to save the Lisbon Treaty is to offer the Irish a partial withdrawal from the European Union. This, at least, takes the decision of Irish voters seriously – even though that was likely not the Irish intent. The mere mention of such an option sends the right message, however. A co-operative treaty with member states that wish to be temporarily relieved of the obligation to take part in certain institutions could help Europe move beyond the malaise.

The European train has come a long way, despite allowing the slowest member to determine the overall speed. But from now on that is the wrong tempo. Even German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble's proposal that Europeans be allowed to directly elect an EU president goes well beyond the timid Lisbon Treaty. The European Council should take the plunge and tie a referendum to the European elections next year.

The wording of the referendum would have to be sufficiently clear to allow voters to reach a decision on the EU's future direction. And all European citizens should cast their ballots on the same day, using the same procedure and on the same issue – all across the continent. One of the short-comings of referenda to date has been that the formation of opinion has remained stuck in individual national contexts.

With luck and commitment, a two-speed Europe could emerge from such a vote, if the countries where the referendum is accepted joined forces to cooperate more closely in the areas of foreign, security, economic and social policy.

Were they confronted with an alternative those recently acceded countries in central and south-eastern Europe would also seriously reflect on where their interests lie. And for sceptical member states, a politically successful core Europe could generate additional appeal. Finally, an internal differentiation – as legally difficult as it may be – could facilitate the controversial enlargement of the union.

The German intellectual Jürgen Habermas, 78, is one of the most influential philosophers in the world. Bridging continental and Anglo-American traditions of thought, his work ranges from social-political theory to aesthetics, epistemology and language, philosophy of religion, political-legal thought, sociology, communication studies, developmental psychology and theology. He is perhaps best known for his work on the concept of the public sphere, the analysis of advanced capitalist societies, democracy and the rule of law, and contemporary politics, particularly German politics. In 2003, together with his French counterpart, the late Jacques Derrida, Habermas made a plea for the rebirth of the European Union.

- This article, translated from the German by Christopher Sultan, first appeared in Der Spiegel on 19 June 2008.

business backbone

Close-up of the Sail footbridge across the Tawe in Swansea's SA1 development, designed by Newport-based Rowecord, one of Wales's leading indigenous SMEs.

rhys david argues we should focus on promoting medium-sized companies to build our economic base

Why, despite all the efforts put into turning it around, including the spending of more than £1bn of EU Objective One funding, does the Welsh economy remain a persistent and perpetual laggard? Table 1 shows how far down the league table Wales finds itself, and especially the west Wales and the Valleys Objective 1 region.

The excessive size of the public sector has been the favoured culprit of recent years, and it is certainly true that by international standards it is large, at two thirds of Welsh Gross Domestic Product. Yet, we don't have armies of public servants dusting the statues in Cathays Park or shampooing the sheep in Senghenydd, and while we may or may not have too many bureaucrats servicing the Assembly Government, they represent only a small proportion of public expenditure.

The evidence would not seem to suggest we have too many nurses or teachers, street sweepers or park keepers. Our public realm is probably staffed – give or take some adjustments – at about the right level for a modern advanced industrial society, particularly one with an ageing population requiring a high level of services.

The real problem, as former Welsh Secretary, Peter Hain among others, has identified, is the private sector, which represents far too small a share of Wales's economic output. Moreover, as has perhaps not been properly recognised to date by policy-makers or economic analysts, it is where the deficit exists – in sound medium-sized companies with strong roots in Wales – that the main difficulty is concentrated.

While much attention is rightly given by policymakers to small entrepreneurial businesses, particularly those in modern sectors such as new media, information technology, and the biosciences, as well as to the largest Welsh businesses, such as Airbus, the gap in the middle tends to have gone largely unnoticed. The structure of the Welsh business sector and the part this plays in our overall economic performance and competitiveness, is not being factored into the economic equation.

Figures that appear annually in business league tables produced, for example, by the *Western Mail* and *Wales Business Insider* and their respective partners illustrate the point. At the top end of the scale, according to figures collected in Insider's *United Kingdom plc*, Wales has just three companies with a turnover in excess of £1bn. This compared with 19 in Scotland and seven in the North-East, the latter probably the nearest comparable region to Wales (see table 2). Other regions are broadly similar to Scotland, the East Midlands having 15 £1bn plus companies, the West Midlands 21 and Yorkshire and Humberside 17, with only Northern Ireland having fewer than Wales.

But it is not just at the top that the gap appears. Even more worryingly, further down the list, the 25th biggest company in the South-West of England has a turnover of £658m, in the East of England £838m, in Scotland £771m and in the North East £273m. For Wales the figure is £185m. There is a swathe of middle-sized companies missing in Wales, with all the employment, career opportunities, research activity, business service support, distribution requirements and wage contribution to the local economy that this implies.

The position is much the same if market capitalisation, representing the total value placed by investors on a company is used – in some ways this is a more accurate measure of company size. Only 26 Welsh companies are quoted on the main London stock exchange, far fewer than in other comparable British regions (the top 16 quoted companies are listed in Table 3 overleaf). A further 18 companies are quoted on the secondary Alternative Investment Market (AIM). The list is dominated by Admiral Insurance, which at more than £2bn accounts for more than half the total value of Welsh quoted companies.

While over the past three years the number of Welsh quoted companies in both exchanges has increased by just one,

table 1: GDP comparisons between Wales and other EU countries and regions

Inner London	303
East Wales	115
Luxembourg	264
Germany	115
Brussels	241
France	112
Hamburg	202
EU	100
Prague	160
NE England	96
Ireland	143
Wales	92
Netherlands	131
W. Wales/ Valleys	79
UK	119
Czech Republic	77

Source: Eurostat 2008

membership of the list has changed considerably. Ten companies have left over that period, mainly through take-over or reversion to private sector status. These include the major retailer Peacock Group, business supplies provider PHS, BBI Holdings, Biotrace, and Ubiquity. They have been replaced by such newcomers as Amerisur Resources, media groups Boomerang and Freshwater, Tinopolis (soon to leave the AIM market), the electronics group Enfis, the property group Eatonfield, and miners Energybuild.

The *Western Mail* has a much more generous interpretation of what constitutes a Welsh interest stock, including various businesses registered outside Wales that actively trade here. Even so the list has been shrinking. In 1998 its Welsh interest share selection contained 80 companies, including such names as Cardiff steelmaker ASW (subsequently absorbed by Celsa), Hyder (re-organised into Welsh Water), airports group TBI (acquired by Spanish company Abertis), Biotrace (acquired by 3M), Iceland supermarket owner, Big Food Group (now part of Icelandic Baugur group) and medical technology maker, Gyrus (acquired by Olympus, the Japanese camera group).

table 2: UK companies by region

Region	Number £1bn+	Leading Company	Turnover £bn	Biggest Non-Retail £bn	25th biggest by turnover £m
S. West	15	Somerfield	5.2	4.7	658
East	15	Tesco	42.6	9.5	838
E. Midlands	15	Pendragon	5.1	2.3	566
W. Midlands	21	E.On	6.9	4.8	744
NW	17	Unilever	26.7	–	757
Y&H	17	Asda	14.8	3.1	575
N. East	7	Barratt	2.43	–	273
Scotland	19	Standard Life	15.3	–	771
N. Ireland	0	Viridian	0.98	832	167
Wales	3	Novelis	1.6	–	185

Source: Insider United Kingdom plc

economy

Encouragingly, the newcomers do include a number of companies from high technology sectors, such as Chromogenex, IQE, Netalogue, Newport Networks, Pure Wafer, and Spectrum Technologies, as well as media businesses such as Tinopolis, Boomerang, Enfis, and Freshwater, plus a handful of energy and resources groups and financial services companies. However, with the exception of Admiral and Moneysupermarket.com, the north Wales price comparison website, the market capitalisation of most of these companies remains generally very small.

This matters in a number of ways, which current economic development policy does not seem likely to rectify. Companies come and companies go and Wales slowly makes progress in developing a more modern manufacturing and services base. Yet Wales's stock of strong medium-sized companies remains small. Certainly, it is not growing fast enough to help create an economy comparable with other regions of the UK or indeed, other dynamic parts of the European Union, including some of the recent new entrants.

This impacts on Wales's ability to offer a wide range of career opportunities, but there are other consequences. Our

underdeveloped private sector means the opportunities for the professional services sector to grow in size and sophistication are limited unless it seeks to work extensively outside Wales. Insider's figures show that in the period under review – end October 2006 to end October 2007 – the biggest deal done in Wales was the stock market flotation of Moneysupermarket.com, at £366m. However, the tenth biggest was a massive drop down to a £15m management buy-in. In contrast, Scotland registered a top deal of £11.6bn, for the take-over of Scottish Power by Spanish energy producer, Iberdrola, and its tenth biggest came in at £744m. In the North-East of England the biggest deal was £2.2bn, and in the South-West, £10.9bn.

As a direct result, Wales is not very fertile ground for professional service firms such as banks, accountants, management consultants, solicitors, and search agencies. A further consequence is that many of them choose to keep only a token presence in Cardiff or to make their Welsh operations a branch of Bristol, Birmingham or Manchester centred operations.

table 3: Welsh companies quoted on the London Stock Exchange (top 16)

Company	Sector	Market Capitalisation £m (end June 2008)
Admiral	Insurance	2,130
Moneysupermarket	Financial Services	596
Redrow	Construction	253
Amerisur Resources	Oil and Gas Producers	68.6
IQE	Technology	65
Dee Valley	Food	43.4
Wynnstay	Retailing	36.5
Energybuild	Mining	38.2
Finsbury Foods	Food	26.5
Anglesey Mining	Mining	25.9
Eatonfield	Real Estate	25.6
Boomerang	Media	16.3
Enfis	Electronics	8.9
Pure Wafer	Technology	8.8
Freshwater	Media	8.3
Hawtin	Real estate	5.42

Source: London Stock Exchange

table 4: Welsh-headquartered companies by turnover

Company	Sector	Turnover £m	Period: year ending
Redrow	Construction	796	30/06/07
Admiral	Insurance	825	31/12/07
Peacock	Clothing retailing	607	31/03/06
Glas Cymru	Water	578	31/03/07
Principality	Finance	291	31/12/06
David Mclean	Construction	279	30/06/06
Capper	Food retailing	261	30/04/07
PHS	Services	188	31/03/05
Sinclair Motor	Motor distribution	169	31/12/07
JD Cleverly	Motor distribution	145	31/12/06

Source: Western Mail Wales Top 300, 2007. December 2007

This is not a problem that is going to be solved very easily or very quickly. It will need something more than the usual sort of economic development policies that have been followed both pre and post devolution, generally speaking with little impact. For the most part, these have set out to offer Wales as a location within which businesses can operate profitably, whether they be indigenous, from the rest of the UK or abroad. Essentially, policy has not sought to influence the type, character or ownership of investors beyond seeking to ensure Wales secures some representation in what are perceived at the time to be growth sectors with reasonably good prospects in front of them.

What should be done? While efforts to attract inward investment, to encourage local entrepreneurialism and to stimulate research-based spin-offs from our universities must continue, we should examine just what policy measures are needed to develop an economy that more closely resembles our Celtic neighbours and other comparable UK regions. And, controversially, such a policy would seek to identify areas where there is a reasonable chance that viable businesses could be established in sectors where Wales is currently weak. Undoubtedly, this would require a degree of Welsh Assembly Government involvement.

Trying to pick winners is, of course, widely regarded as not a skill Government is likely to have and has largely been abandoned since the Thatcher era in Britain. But the same is not true of France and some other countries where the belief that specialisation through globalisation is the only viable economic route has not been embraced as fully as in the UK. It will also be argued that Assembly officials lack the skills to involve themselves in working closely with businesses in identifying opportunities and brokering deals.

Yet the limitations of globalisation have become much more apparent over recent months. The dangers of relying too heavily on a handful of powerful sectors such as financial services, pharmaceuticals and international aviation are now being appreciated. In this new climate an opportunity is being created in which Wales should stress that it is in our economic interests to develop a more balanced and sustainable economy.

Basic sectors such as food and drink, public transport, distribution, retailing (high street and internet), hospitality services, property and construction, telecoms and energy supply are key economic building blocks and are areas where efforts should be made to bring together Welsh companies that can offer a locally-based service to Welsh consumers. Once a Welsh base has been established they can expand outside Wales into neighbouring markets in England.

There are plenty of other areas where Wales is also under-represented. To take one example, the press sector is particularly weak in Wales yet the component parts that could lead to the creation of a Welsh media group are in existence. This is just one of a number of areas where Welsh companies could be encouraged to co-operate or to amalgamate to create stronger groups that can expand outside Wales, just as the



independent television production company Tinopolis has done. Ways also have to be found to ensure Welsh companies participate in areas such as new forms of energy and in providing the goods and services needed to cater for Europe's ageing populations.

Of course, Government mechanisms for supporting Welsh companies already exist, and recent changes have resulted in a simplified structure for delivering funds and advice. What is needed now is for this capacity in the civil service to be deployed in a much more active way. Instead of responding passively to company approaches, Government should take ideas to business, including in some cases suggestions for the re-organisation of whole sectors to create stronger Welsh groups that are able to compete more effectively.

These suggestions will be anathema to those who believe Government should not involve itself in company affairs other than as a supplier of financial assistance and general advice. Present policy accepts this argument and so we continue to wait for outside investors to come and take advantage of our offering of labour, finance and location to make products or provide services here *after* they have been patented, designed and modelled elsewhere.

This is a prescription for Wales to continue to operate as a largely satellite economy and to fail to secure the benefits of full involvement, including a much greater degree of ownership, in modern business sectors. Unless this happens it is hard to see how we are ever going to move up any of the economic league tables we currently prop up, including those reflecting buoyant private sector activity.

Ifor Williams Trailers at Cynwyd near Corwen, another successful Welsh indigenous SME. It is the UK's leader in the field of design and manufacture of vehicle trailers.

Rhys David, a former journalist with the Financial Times, is a Trustee of the IWA.

dial M for management

christopher ward on
leading the way out of our
'dependency culture'

In a small, clever country, with international ambitions, attitudes to management need to change fast, so that respect for managers as professionals, and a hunger for continuous personal development, is the norm, not a rose-tinted aspiration. This is no small aspiration, for even in a country as small as Wales we have 180,000 managers, all of whom need to think about upgrading their skills.

We would never agree to go under the surgeon's knife, accept antibiotics from a doctor, fly to Malaga, ask a plumber to sort out our leaking washing machine, or an electrician to rewire our house, if we did not believe that those involved had the skills and experience to do a good job, with our best interests at heart. Yet, we accept jobs that will determine our life style, our contribution to society, and the future of our children, without any thought as to whether those running the organisation have the skills to do so.

Current thinking about management skills, styles, competencies, and impact is becoming increasingly sophisticated and helpful. But attitudes to managers and management still tend to move in the opposite direction.

The attitude-balance is tilted towards negative concepts of 'yesterday's manager' characterised by the 'boss' or the 'suit' exercising repressive control, if not exploitation, who 'keep down' their employees. On the other hand 'today's managers' should be supportive, encouraging, flexible, creative, keen to develop the talents of their employees, and 'build them up' for their own and the company's good.

Wales will not become a 'small, clever country' unless we break the attitudes that down-grade management and look on suggestions that managers might develop their skills as intrusive, critical, if not patronising. Cardiff University Business School carried out some research a couple of years ago on the provision of leadership and management development opportunities in Wales. They established that the problem is absolutely not on the supply side, at least in terms of quantity. In Wales we have a course or development programme for every ten managers. On that basis we should be the best managed country in the world. However, availability does not guarantee take-up. Moreover, the quality of the provision is variable, and many providers simply do not engage with the market they seek to serve.

Our problem is that we are supply-side dominated, with public funding regimes increasingly driving suppliers in directions (either in terms of market focus or measurable outcomes) that are completely opposite to or 'out of sync' with the needs of a market place dominated by micro and small organisations.

We need a revolution in our thinking, and a more dynamic and demanding market, with a willingness to invest in that which will produce real benefits. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently considering its formal response to the final report of the Leitch Review of Skills. Lord Leitch's recommendations are directed at England, but what some people refer to as 'the spirit

"Management is neither a science nor a profession, neither a function nor a combination of functions. Management is a practice – it has to be appreciated through experience, in context. Management may use science, but is an art that is combined with science through craft. In other words, managers have to face issues in the full complexity of living, not as compartmentalised packages. Knowledge may be important, but wisdom – the capacity to combine knowledge from different sources and use it judiciously – is the key."
Jonathan Gosling and Henry Mintzberg 'The Education of Practising Managers', MIT Sloan Management Review, Summer 2004

of Leitch' will certainly influence our Government's thinking and policy making. Leitch argues that Government intervention should be focused on basic skills (something that Wales would fully endorse, and has already set examples that England, encouraged by Lord Leitch, will follow). And he goes on to say that the higher the skill, the more organisations or individuals are expected to pay for it themselves.

In Lord Leitch's terminology, management skills are 'higher skills', but he also provides the startling statistic that in terms of general education, 41 per cent of managers in the UK have skills at Level 2 (GCSE grades A* – C) or below. So to get higher we have to start quite low. In a 'dependency culture' Lord Leitch's recommendations sound revolutionary, but it could be the single most important recommendation. If followed it would turn a 'dependency culture' into an 'investment culture'. The questions for the Welsh Assembly Government are: (i) should they follow that recommendation and cut or end subsidies, forcing everyone to go 'cold turkey'; or (ii) should they establish the equivalent of 'rehab clinics' to help bring about change gradually?

Whatever the answer, it is clear that strategies must use public money as a direct lever for change by priming the pump, and acknowledge the benefits that will flow from the investment.

To date we have tended to promote 'learning' as valuable in itself. But this does not engage the market. In the great supermarket of life, which aisle are you drawn to, the one that is headed 'Develop your management skills' or the one that says 'Make more money'? For too long we have made the mistake of promoting the means, not the ends.

If we need any evidence of the cumulative impact of campaigns that promote things that are good for us, look at the increase in awareness in the last five years or so, of fat, salt, sugar, alcohol, five-a-day fruit and vegetables and exercise on our physical well-being. Consider the amazing change in our vocabulary which now includes 'carbon footprint' almost as naturally as 'Mine's a pint'.

We change attitudes by changing language, by engaging with people where they are. We need to tap into latent common sense which is often obliterated or stifled by jargon and by solutions that are not fit for purpose (including many formal

qualifications). We need to move away from an emphasis on improvement because you are not very good, to getting even better than you are.

A way of thinking about this uses three Ms – mystique, mechanics, and meaning – easy to remember, powerful and a delight to all who revel in similar accumulations of capital letters across the management spectrum. Let's destroy the **mystique** that managers are over-paid, over there, and over me; that the title manager automatically and miraculously invests the holder with skills they never had before; and that once you are a manager your common sense and natural people skills must be ignored and replaced by dictums handed down by academics who use an impenetrable language that relates to a world of work that is unlike any you have experienced.

Let's give due weight to the **mechanics** of management. There are tools, techniques, models, and procedures whose virtue is that they make things simpler, save time, and are tried and tested. Promoting these as practical ways of making business better and solving current problems, is the essence of developing better management skills. But it is the practice, not the theory, that must come first.

And most important of all, let's give some real thought to the **meaning** of management. What's it all for? The first answer, quite rightly, from most people will relate to corporate objectives and success, however you wish to define it. But the real meaning relates to people. Objectives and success are achieved by people. Their attitude to work, and their productivity, will be directly related to the way they are managed, and the meaning work has for them. Does it use their talents fully? Do they enjoy it? Do they feel it is a wider purpose? Does it give them the personal satisfaction that they need?

Unless managers unpick the role of management in terms of the meaning of work for all the people with whom they are involved, they will remain 'yesterday's managers' and work will remain a necessary evil, rather than a desirable good.

Christopher Ward is Chief Executive of the Wales Management Council.

forthcoming conferences

- **Transformation Nation: Responding to Climate Change**
Friday-Saturday 19-20th September
Y Tabernacl, Machynlleth
Keynote Speakers:
George Monbiot,
Sir John Houghton,
Patrick Holden,
Mark Lynas and
Morgan Parry
- **Wales in the World conference**
Monday 20th October
Holiday Inn Cardiff
Keynote Speakers:
Rhodri Morgan, First Minister;
Professor Richard Wyn Jones, Director,
Institute of Welsh Politics; Professor
Dylan Jones-Evans, Director of
Research and Innovation, University
of Wales
- **Innovation in Health and Social Care Delivery – IWA-Academy Health Wales Conference**
Monday 10th November, 9:00am
Parc Thistle Hotel, Cardiff
Keynote Speakers:
Sir Leszek Borysiewicz,
Chief Executive, Medical Research
Council; Dr Tony Jewell, Chief
Medical Officer for Wales



eco dream home

Ripe for renovation – the Hollett’s home a stone’s throw from Three Cliffs Bay in the Gower.

nigel and susannah hollett outline plans for rebuilding their home on the gower coast

We have a project, to rebuild our house to make it the most eco-friendly home in Wales. We live in what must be one of the most beautiful spots in the country, on the Gower peninsula. A short walk from the house is a breathtaking view of Three Cliffs Bay and from the top of the garden we can see as far as the Brecon Beacons.

The house is single storey, built in the 1920s of wooden construction. The original part of the house is cladded by tongued and grooved timber planks, around a wooden frame imported from Canada. Originally it was an office in Swansea Docks. A kitchen and bathroom extension were added in the 1950s, constructed of traditional concrete block with a flat roof made of asbestos sheeting.

We intend to retain a significant part of the original character by reclaiming the internal timber and brick from the chimneys. Where possible we plan to avoid the use of concrete-based products, which are highly energy intensive.



Nigel, Susannah, and daughter Ruby.

We are keen to make sure that the rebuild will be as eco-friendly as possible, using natural materials where we can, applying innovative techniques, and keeping the amount of material going to landfill to a minimum. So, for instance, we will re-use the existing solar panel. We want to make sure that it has a really small ecological footprint, and actually provide many of the resources it will need to operate.

We want to create a beautiful building that produces more energy than it consumes and re-uses rainwater from the roof. We want to continue to collect our own wood to provide fuel for our central heating system, avoiding the use of unsustainable fossil fuels.

We want to install innovative and new technologies that could be replicated elsewhere. Above all, we want to demonstrate that a radical eco-home is something that can be achieved by others, which is why we want to complete the project within a normal house rebuild budget.

We've already begun this process in a small way by building an underground workshop in the garden, using local timber and stone reclaimed from a building site. Precious little from all stages of this building process went to waste and we tried hard to use sustainable and local materials where possible. This included timber for the roofing beams from a nearby nature reserve run by the South and West Wales Wildlife Trust. The inside of the building has been cladded using reclaimed timber and pallets. It is not perfect but has provided a massive stimulus for us to really push the boundaries when it comes to the house rebuild itself.

We are currently discussing our project with a range of organisations who can help us and have an interest in the built environment. We are also looking for an architect who can take us to the next stage of working up our plans and translating lots of ideas into detail. We hope to secure planning permission by late Autumn 2008, accompanied by detailed drawings, building regulations and everything else at the same time. We want to start on site in Spring of 2009, with a view to completing the project by Christmas 2009.

We'd like to think that in a small way our house will inspire others to think about the impact we have on the earth, and to find alternative solutions to the unsustainable path we are currently on. We know that trying to achieve our vision will be difficult and challenging, but we're committed to making it work.

Formerly with the Environment Agency, **Nigel Hollett** works for Peter Brett Associates, an engineering and sustainable development consultancy. **Susannah Hollett** is a full time mum who has worked as a primary school teacher in Manchester, and a youth worker in a women's refuge. Forthcoming issues of Agenda will report on their progress.



Ruby playing in the garden behind the house.



Susannah takes time off from motherhood to devote to her hobby of painting.

A typical mixed woodland view of the Afan river valley in the Commission's Afan Forest Park. Broadleaves are by the riverside with conifers further up the valley slopes.



tree power

jon owen jones on how our woodlands can be used to tackle global warming

When I taught my sixth form about global warming 25 years ago, it was regarded as a controversial theory. Ten years later, it was the subject of my maiden speech in Parliament, and by then, not so controversial, but debatable and certainly not a priority for government. Today, it is at last recognised that the burning of fossil fuels has increased the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which in turn is affecting the world's temperature and weather patterns

Almost all governments pay at least lip service to limit the impact of CO₂ on the atmosphere. Our own governments, both in Cardiff and Westminster, have set ambitious targets to reduce our carbon footprint. Having finally settled the argument over whether climate change is real, the debate has now changed with some calling for major changes in lifestyle so that we use far less carbon, whilst others see this as unrealistic and look for some technological solution.

If we could only invent a machine that absorbed carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and released oxygen as waste; a machine that could store carbon dioxide for centuries, or create a carbon neutral fuel; a machine whose products could be used to build homes or furniture. Of course, Nature has already invented such a machine – it is called a tree. Trees cannot alone undo the damage done by the profligate burning of fossil fuels, but they can make an enormous contribution.

All green plants photosynthesise and in doing so absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and convert it into sugar and

cellulose. In most plants, this carbon will return to the atmosphere within a year as the plant dies and rots. Trees, however, use carbon to make wood which can hold on to that carbon for centuries. Forests account for 90 per cent of the annual interchange of carbon between the atmosphere and the land. They store the equivalent of 4,500 gigatons of carbon dioxide. That's more than all the carbon in the atmosphere and more than all the world's remaining oil stores.

If the world adds to this carbon store it will reduce the rate of climate change. Unfortunately, the reverse is happening. Since 1850, deforestation has released around 120 gigatons of carbon into the atmosphere, and the world's most productive forests in tropical South America, Africa and South East Asia continue to be felled at an alarming rate. Here surely, is an example of catastrophic market failure. To the local people the tropical forests are worth more when felled, and yet to the rest of the world the forests are of far more value left standing.

In developed countries there is some encouraging news. China has recently embarked on large-scale re-forestation, following similar developments in North America and Europe. Wales and the United Kingdom can claim to have set the trend. Faced with a chronic timber shortage during the First World War, Prime Minister, David Lloyd George set up the Forestry Commission, and since 1919 forest cover has nearly tripled in Wales.

Let's set that figure in an historic and geographic context. A thousand years ago most of Britain was woodland. Today 14 per cent of Wales and less than 12 per cent of Britain as a whole is covered with trees. The average tree cover across the European Union is over 30 per cent and across all of Europe it is over 44 per cent. So apart from planting more, what can we do with our Welsh forests to help reduce the rate of global warming and adapt to its effects?

To answer the question I am going to have to introduce a few complications and difficult choices. Woodland ecosystems are usually, but not always, the best store of carbon. The main exception is peat. Often accumulated over thousands of years, water logged acid peat soils do not allow normal decomposition to occur and therefore can build up massive stores of carbon. Upland Wales is often peaty and if drained (to plant trees or improve pasture) will begin to release its carbon into the atmosphere. In the recent past we have paid grants to drain these sites. This is a policy we now have to reverse.

Which trees should we plant? There is a widespread desire to plant more native woodland. This would result in greater biodiversity and accords with a public view of what rural Wales did look like and should look like again. However, many soft wood trees can be grown far more quickly and therefore fix more carbon in a shorter time. Soft wood trees also have a ready market in industry, construction and fuel. The Forestry



Walkers on the Tarren Forgan waymarked trail in the Afan forest park.

Commission is trying to service the needs of recreation, industry, construction and environmental benefit. Its planting policy must try to balance these conflicting pressures. Achieving a consensus around a balance is difficult enough, but climate change is a compounding factor.

A farmer needs to be able to predict the weather over the next nine months when he plants his crop. A forester tries to predict the weather for the next half a century. With 90 years experience we know which trees grow well in different parts of Wales, but will they still thrive in 50 years from now? Welsh summers are likely to get warmer and winters milder. There are also likely to be frequent storms with stronger winds.

Of course, there is a great deal of uncertainty, especially when we consider the effects of climate change on pests and parasites – most of which are likely to benefit from warmer weather and fewer frosts. Indeed, we have arguably already seen the first major impact of climate change on one tree widely grown in the UK. Corsican pine, the preferred commercial species in south-east England has succumbed *en masse* to Red Band Needle Blight, a disease barely heard of 15 years ago.

Deciding on a species mix for the next few years of planting will not be an easy task. With such a range of possibilities, one lesson seems certain: 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket!' Less monoculture and more diversity will give future woodland the best chance.

If which trees to plant is fraught with complexity, is it easier to know when we should we fell trees? From a carbon store point of view, isn't it better to leave them standing as long as possible? Woodlands absorb carbon most quickly when they are growing rapidly. When they become mature, they are no longer taking in more carbon dioxide than they contribute. However, the mature woodland now is a reservoir of locked in carbon. From a purely climate change perspective, the best option is to grow the fastest growing species, then fell them at the end of their peak growth period. The felled wood can then be placed in storage whilst you plant more trees.

But apart from the difficulty of finding somewhere to place all this wood where it cannot decompose doesn't this sound dangerously like a single-purpose objective? Aren't we supposed to be delighting in forests being a truly multi-purpose resource? And of course, this strategy would also waste a valuable product.

So what should we do with the wood? Our starting point should be that wood is a naturally, renewable, sustainable resource. The carbon it contains remains stored for the duration of the product's lifetime, until it decays or is burnt. Welsh wood is used in construction, furniture, panelling, packaging, fencing, paper and as fuel and we can continue to grow it indefinitely.

Where the product is in use for a long time, as in the construction of a house, the carbon is also retained for the full life of the house, assuming it is looked after, and even beyond the life of the house if it is reclaimed and reused. In addition,

when we use the wood to replace concrete or steel we save the energy (and carbon) that has to be used to make the concrete or steel. However, in Wales, only 12 per cent of new homes are being built with timber frames. In Scotland the figure is 65 per cent, so we still have lots of unfulfilled potential, even in just this one product sector.

Where wood is used as a fuel, carbon is released into the atmosphere immediately. If the wood source came from a sustainable forest this is described as carbon neutral, as the replanted forest reabsorbs the carbon that the burnt wood released. This can be seen as helping to tackle climate change if the wood fuel is replacing fossil fuel. Wood fuel use is growing in Wales and elsewhere and governments have introduced incentives to encourage this trend. There may be some danger of perverse outcome where wood destined for longer-term use is converted into fuel. So far, however, the market is differentiating rather well between these different value end uses.

Of course, all fuels should be used at maximum efficiency, but this is rather easier to do with oil and gas than solid fuels like wood. Ideally we would have a large number of combined heat and power units burning wood, thereby making best use of the energy.

Tree growth and tree use can slow the rate of climate change and trees can also help us adapt to the challenge of change. In the last few years Britain has suffered a series of severe floods and it seems likely that these events will become more frequent. Trees planted on hill slopes allow water to percolate into the soil far more quickly than on grassland. Water is then slowly released by woodlands into the rivers, so reducing the risk of flooding downstream.

Trees planted in flood plains also slow down the water flow. Trees can also make life more pleasant in our cities. Apart from their beauty, they help shade and cool the hot summer streets.

Managing Wales's woodlands for the benefit of its many users is often a difficult balance of competing pressures. Climate change increases the complexity of this balance but it also gives us another reason to value and enhance the power of our trees, woods and forests.

Jon Owen Jones is Chair of Forestry Commission Wales. He was Labour MP for Cardiff Central from 1992 to 2005 and a Minister for the Environment, Farming and Forestry at the Welsh Office during the 1990s.



Filling in drains at the Lake Vyrnwy nature reserve in the Berwyn Mountains.

blanket bog

jared wilson explains how an innovative conservation scheme can bring benefits to upland Wales

a major £2.75m project is underway to restore a blanket bog habitat on a RSPB nature reserve at Lake Vyrnwy in the Berwyn Mountains. This is an internationally important habitat covering more than 18,000 hectares within the Migneint-Arenig-Dduallt and Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains Special Areas of Conservation in north Wales.

The uplands of Wales support significant areas of threatened blanket bog habitat. Vast lengths of open drain were dug into the uplands during the post-war period in a failed attempt to significantly increase agricultural productivity. These drains have resulted in deterioration in the quality of the blanket bog habitat through a decline in many blanket bog species.

Approximately 10 per cent of the world's blanket bog occurs in the UK, but it is under threat from drainage, fire and non-native plant species. The Active Blanket Bog project at Lake Vyrnwy will block over 120km of moorland drains, clear Sitka spruce plantation from 18 hectares of blanket bog, and remove self-seeding non-native plant species from a further 600 hectares. Funded by the European Union, the project is a partnership with the RSPB, Forestry Commission Wales, Environment Agency, Severn Trent Water, and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Operating for five years between August 2006 and March 2011 the project is also providing a platform for vital research into the potential for carbon budget and wider Ecosystem Service gains. Local contractors are being used to carry out the majority of the work. A large number of visitors are travelling to the site



Drainage channels dug out during mid-20th Century have deteriorated the quality of the blanket bog. Habitat.

to see an example of large-scale habitat management in Wales. The project is therefore bringing significant contributions to the local rural economy.

Blanket bog occurs in areas of high rainfall and relatively low temperatures. This allows key bog plant species such as *Sphagnum* mosses to thrive. The high water table and acid conditions also suppress the decomposition of dead plant material. Over long periods this accumulates as thick layers of peat. In some areas, the process has been taking place for thousands of years resulting in peat depths in excess of five metres. Peat provides a vast carbon source. When dried it

consists of 80 per cent carbon. It has been estimated that the peat-lands in the UK store more carbon than all of the trees in the UK and France combined.

The drier conditions resulting from the drains have major implications for climate change. Exposure of peat to the elements allows the decomposition processes previously slowed by the waterlogged conditions to accelerate. This results in a flush of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere. A loss of dry peat from the surface by both wind and rain erosion, and the leaching of carbon into streams and watercourses. The mobilisation of such large volumes of carbon and the resultant

Peat moors on the Berwyn.



flux in greenhouse gasses undermines our ability to tackle climate change. We do not yet know what the impact of the restoration work on the carbon stores at Lake Vyrnwy will be, although research monitoring should tell us by the end of the project.

Monitoring will also assess the impact of the ditch blocking work upon water colour, run-off rates and sediment loads. As well as potentially contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, large sums of money are currently spent by utility companies removing water colour in purpose built treatment works. It has been shown elsewhere that upland ditch blocking work can be more cost-effective in reducing water colour than such 'hard engineering' approaches. Similarly, ditch-blocking work may result in a reduction in flash flooding of upland streams with restored bogs absorbing heavy rainfall before slowly releasing water during drier periods.

Together with the Countryside Council for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government is jointly responsible for ensuring that 95 per cent of Natura 2000 Special Areas for Conservation and Special Protection are in favourable or recovering condition by 2010. At present, only about 30 per cent achieve this status. Two of the commonest reasons for blanket bog being in unfavourable condition are the presence of drains or non-native tree species.

Through the development of a partnership between a consortium of UK universities, the RSPB and the other project partners, it has been possible to establish a substantial research platform at Lake Vyrnwy. The experimental design that this has provided has attracted more than £1m of research to the project site at Lake Vyrnwy. The result is to make it a major landscape-scale research site. To date the research has focused upon the assessment of the restoration work and climate change upon greenhouse gas emissions from the blanket bog. This should enable us to develop a predictive model to estimate the impacts of similar large-scale change upon greenhouse gas emissions across the uplands of Wales.

We hope the project will promote a widespread introduction of drainage blocking across the uplands. The farming community has raised a number of concerns, especially the loss of livestock in blocked drains. The project is very fortunate in that the Lake Vyrnwy site is an organic farm, and the project therefore must operate within a hill farm context. The project is monitoring the incidence of stock loss in blocked and unblocked drains, with preliminary results suggesting that stock losses actually decline following blocking.

In assessing the impacts of the habitat restoration work being carried out at Lake Vyrnwy upon biodiversity, the local economy, agriculture, water colour, run-off rates and carbon storage/sequestration it is hoped that a costed assessment of the Ecosystem Service gains of such work will be established for the first time. This has the potential to influence land management policy across Wales and beyond.

Dr Jared Wilson is Manager of the European Commission LIFE (L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement) Active Blanket Bog in Wales project.



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Chairman of the Richard Commission



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Professor of Palliative Medicine
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Lord (Kenneth) Morgan
One of Wales's leading historians

The work of the IWA depends on the support and contribution of individual members across Wales and beyond who share our determination to mobilise the nation's human and social resources in order to face the challenges ahead.

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school effectiveness

david egan reports on a new programme aimed at transforming Welsh education

The eminent sociologist Basil Bernstein once famously suggested that it was not possible for "education to compensate for society". This has subsequently served as an underpinning theoretical and philosophical standpoint for those who believe that factors associated with class, gender and ethnicity – singly and sometimes in combination – dictate that educational achievement will always be constrained by the socio-economic dowry that our young people inherit by dint of birth. In justification they have been able to cite multitudes of attempts across the globe, well-meant, but ultimately doomed to failure, to counteract and reverse the seemingly umbilical link between disadvantage and low achievement.

Those of a more positive frame of mind – including many progressive politicians – have always viewed Bernstein's dictum as being a counsel of despair. Over the last thirty years they have sought affirmation from the growing body of evidence

that schools can actually make a difference to the educational prospects of those who came from less privileged backgrounds. The School Improvement movement associated with this standpoint, originated in the USA but was translated first to the UK by, amongst others, David Reynolds and colleagues at what was then the Department of Education in the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire at Cardiff.

Pioneering work in the field of School Improvement and the related area of School Effectiveness, has also owed much to the work of two other Welsh-born academics, David Hopkins and Alma Harris. This has not, however, been a field restricted to the work of academics. There has always been a significant interest and involvement of schools, LEAs and national governments in this area. However, despite these Welsh influences, hitherto involvement in the field has been noticeably less strong in Wales than in other parts of the UK and many countries across the world. This all changed with the launch of a major Schools Effectiveness programme by Education Minister Jane Hutt in the spring of 2008.

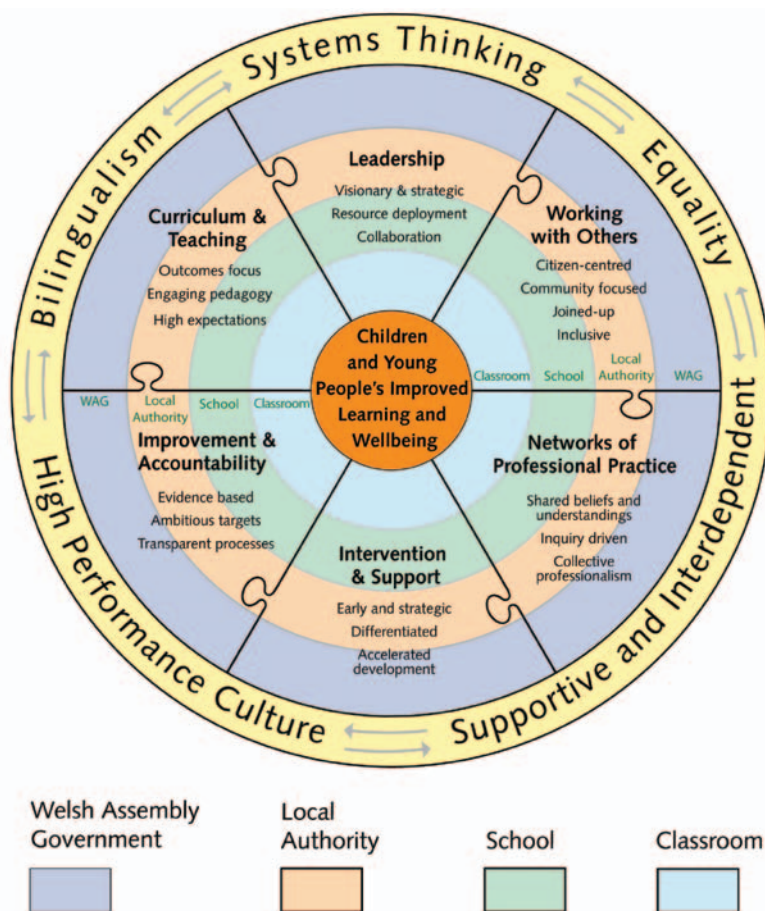
What, then, does the School Improvement/Effectiveness tradition have to say that recognises Bernstein's contention but suggests that it is overly pessimistic? In essence it offers a body of increasingly secure knowledge drawn from education systems across the world that points to how schools can improve and, how, if they are able to sustain this improvement, they can evolve into effective organisations. Where this process of change becomes deep and systemic schools can become transformed entities.

International studies have suggested that this 'school effect', whereby some schools can achieve far more for their students than other schools in similar circumstances, can contribute anything between 5 and 18 per cent in outcomes. One study in the Netherlands suggested that primary school students in the least effective school would need to spend another two years at the end of the primary stage, compared to young people who had attended the most effective school. Another study of secondary schooling in England pointed to this difference being the equivalent of a student getting seven B grades at GCSE in the most effective school, to seven D grades in the least effective. We know that in relation to future wellbeing that these are life-changing differences.

The variations that exist in educational achievement are ones that can be seen between schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. Variations also exist between phases of education with primary appearing to achieve better outcomes for students than secondary schools. There are differences, too, between local education authorities, and also types of school, with the more selective doing better than the least selective. In addition, as the PISA results which benchmark the international performance of students in OECD countries, showed in the Autumn of 2007, there



the schools effectiveness 'pizza' for change



The School Effectiveness Framework policy's 'pizza' for change – requiring co-ordination between the classroom, schools, local authorities and the Assembly Government.

are wide variations between nations, and not least the nations of the United Kingdom.

However, the biggest variation of all is generally what happens within individual schools, and especially between classrooms and teachers. The work of David Reynolds and others suggests that this can have three times the impact as the differences between schools. This is because it is the quality of teaching that is the paramount factor in school effectiveness. There should be no surprise in this, you might think, as it seems to confirm the 'folk knowledge' that those who have experienced the education system at first hand often articulate. Nonetheless, following extensive research we now understand just how powerful teaching quality can be, what effect it has on student learning, and how schools can improve through using and networking the best intelligence they have within their own systems.

Of course, those involved in school improvement and effectiveness recognise the position put forward by Bernstein. They know that class, gender and ethnicity are powerful determinants of educational outcomes. In Wales they are confronted each day with the true meaning and effects of child and family poverty. Nevertheless, the relationship between disadvantage, low educational performance and school effectiveness is complex. Some schools seem able to overcome significant disadvantage in their student population and achieve results that are at a much higher level than similar schools. The

knowledge of how they achieve this is something that we have now captured. What has proved far more intractable is scaling this up so that all schools in similar, or even more challenging circumstances, can achieve the same effect. Examples from across the world show that creating a national system based on individual instances of success is seemingly not possible. In this sense school effectiveness, like so much else in life, is technically simple but socially complex.

We also know that where schools have high concentrations of disadvantaged students they often find it extremely difficult to sustain improvement. They are caught in a vortex made up of the multiple aspects of deprivation that reflect the communities in which they are located. Often they use images such as 'treading water', 'fire-fighting' and 'running to stand still' to describe their daily existence. Teacher quality is a key factor. We know that to improve these schools need the best teachers. However, as a recent study in England has demonstrated, they find it difficult to recruit and retain any staff at all, let alone those of high quality.

They are aware that it will be improvements in teaching and the quality of the learning experience for students that will help them to move forward. Yet for most of their time they are beset with dealing with problems outside of the classroom and the immediate education experience. This is an example where extra resources and funding might make a difference, although that is another complex relationship. Schools in less challenging,

but nevertheless difficult circumstances, might benefit even more from extra funding. But neither receive significant amounts of additional resources within our existing school funding system.

If the quality of teaching is critical to success in school effectiveness then leadership is not far behind. Some contend that it might be the most important. For instance, David Hopkins argues that outstanding head-teachers know what no one else does, and that is how in practice schools can be transformed. He believes that such individuals have the potential to be 'system leaders', capable of contributing to leadership across the system in helping schools become more effective. Through extensive research in the field we now know the essential characteristics that make for successful school leadership. A fundamental requirement is that our heads should first and foremost lead teaching and learning within their schools and not become overwhelmed by every day managerial burdens. As David Hargreaves has suggested, we might wish to think of our senior professionals as 'head-learners' rather than as 'head-teachers'!

Of course there is a limit to what outstanding head-teachers can do, just as there are confines to what schools faced by challenging circumstances can achieve. While schools can make a difference, ultimately they cannot do it alone. Similarly, while schools which become effective make the biggest difference of all for disadvantaged students, they are the ones that need the greatest amount of help and support from outside the school itself. It is these schools that we need to provide what students are unable to get elsewhere.

Most readers of this article will take for granted, as do the parents of the most privileged young people in Wales, that what schools cannot provide for their children and grandchildren in terms of educational, recreational and other forms of support, they will arrange. Young people from our disadvantaged communities generally can count on none of these things outside of school. Therefore, as an essential part of our Child Poverty Implementation Strategy in Wales we need disadvantaged schools to become genuine community schools open for much longer periods of time, offering young people a range of additional formal and informal learning opportunities and access to a wider range of integrated services to support their needs.

We have a community-focused schools policy in Wales but currently it has neither the funding nor the focus on our most disadvantaged areas to achieve the required ends. Here is a real opportunity for the new Communities Next programme to support school effectiveness and target the effects and outcomes of child poverty. As Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College, observes in a chillingly honest way in relation to his own students, "Why do we give so much more to those who have so much already?"

What we know about our most effective schools in Wales is that they use a range of resources – what may be called forms of capital – to achieve their success. In the first place they make effective use of their financial resources to maximise learning opportunities for their students and the quality of their teachers

and other staff. The knowledge and skill of those staff – their intellectual capital – is critical in achieving the teaching quality that is the key to classroom effectiveness.

The values that a school teaches constitute its spiritual capital. This is often of fundamental importance for those schools that succeed in achieving remarkable results despite the challenging circumstances in which they are located. Such schools refuse to accept that disadvantage equals failure. They nurture and build the confidence and self-esteem of students as essential precursors to any success they may have in introducing them to knowledge, skills and understanding.

Finally, effective schools exploit social capital through the support that other schools, the community and parents are able to offer them. It is through the leadership of these schools that these factors are brought together in the specific situation in which every school finds itself.

Local education authorities are critical as well. In England, as part of the increasing marketisation of education, the school effectiveness role has been increasingly marginalised. Some would argue for the same position to be taken in Wales. There is a question mark over the capacity of 22 LEAs to support school effectiveness. However, evidence from around the world suggest that in fact 'districts' and local education authorities do have a major role to play in supporting schools in this area. What appears to be critical is that they concentrate on the things that they can do best and do not try to replicate what schools themselves are best at. This is the attention they can pay to the classroom, where the biggest difference of all is made.

LEAs need to have in place additional funding support for those schools that need the greatest help. It is unlikely that this will be achieved by all 22 LEAs pursuing this agenda on their own. Consequently, the move to create four powerful LEA consortia in Wales represents an appropriate response.

The implementation of the new School Effectiveness Framework from September 2008 is an event of enormous significance for education in Wales. It could be suggested that almost ten years after the arrival of devolution, it is a moment of defining significance. This is the first time that any nation across the world has attempted to use the knowledge we have on school effectiveness as a national project designed to bring about educational transformation at this scale.

As the PISA results that were published late in 2007 revealed, in benchmarking terms Wales has improved its levels of educational performance. However, in comparative terms our level of performance is modest. If we are to progress from where we are now the School Effectiveness Framework has a critical part to play. Here is a policy intervention whose scope for achieving real change is perhaps more fundamental than any other available to the Assembly Government.

David Egan is Professor Of Education at UWIC where he is Director of the Institute for Applied Education Research.

pam boyd advocates a
holistic approach to learning

community schools

The Assembly Government's 2002 report *Narrowing the Gap* on the performance of schools concluded that a "focus on community provision has the potential to bring multiple benefits for learners, schools and their communities". A year later the Assembly Government issued a circular, *Community Focused Schools*. This defined a community focused school as "one that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community". It recognised that many schools across Wales were already working in this way, and had been for years.

Since 2005, the Assembly Government has made funding available to all 22 local education authorities to develop community-focused schools in their areas, and will continue to make this funding available until 2011. Working closely with this initiative, ContinYou Cymru has been providing a range of learning opportunities outside the school day.

Experience over the past three years has shown that community schools are about far more than just dual-use of buildings. In the most effective community focused schools the approach drives whole school planning. It is not seen as just an 'add on'. Working in collaboration with the schools, families and the wider community it can make a real difference to children and young people.

All schools can develop a community focused schools approach and, indeed, this is the Assembly Government's vision. There is growing recognition at national and local levels across Wales, that community focused schools cannot be the province of schools alone. Community focused schools also go beyond the Local Education Authority. Both the statutory and the third sector have key roles.

Community focused schools can be a way of helping to achieve priorities in Local Authorities' Community Plans and their Health, Social Care and Well-being Plans. The requirement for all Local Authorities to have Children and Young People's Plans in place from September 2008 is seen as a way of embedding a community focused schools approach to help meet the outcomes in those plans.

While the ethos and principles of the extended schools approach in England are the same, it is being rolled out differently. By 2010 all schools in England, typically working in clusters and with a range of partners, have to provide a core offer of:

- A varied menu of activities, including study support, play, and childcare.
- Community access to school facilities.
- Specialist services for targeted groups.
- Parenting support.

The roll out in Wales includes these elements as well as allowing different approaches to respond responding to local needs. Estyn's May 2008 report, *Provision of community-focused services and facilities by schools*, examined how well schools and local authorities had used the Assembly Government's



sandfields secondary school, neath port talbot

The school serves a large housing estate of some 17,000 people, situated in a Communities First area where unemployment is an issue. Headteacher Mike Gibbon, feels the school has a key role in regenerating the community. Working with the Communities First partnership and Neath Port Talbot College, STRIDES, an adult learning centre, has been developed at the school. This offers training in hair and beauty, plumbing, electronics, painting and decorating and business administration. It also houses a crèche. Other provision includes recruiting a Youth Inclusion Officer, setting up a nurture group and homework club, as the head teacher recognizes that some pupils have wider needs which need to be addressed to be ready to learn. A gym has just opened for use by the community



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ysgol y dderi, ceredigion

This primary school of 121 pupils was opened as an area school in 1976 following the closure of six village schools. The school has a long history of working as a community focused school through providing facilities and hosting a range of community learning activities. A community focused schools grant has been used to employ a co-ordinator who has carried out an audit in the six villages to identify gaps in provision. This resulted in the production of a calendar of events produced four times a year. Informal monitoring suggests that new people are attending classes and events in all communities. A relationship has developed with a history group which is currently researching the Victorians and will produce a booklet with the school as part of its history curriculum. Other plans include developing an organic garden, and providing teaching assistants. The co-ordinator has been successful in securing £14,000 from the Assembly Government's Local Environment Quality grant to add value to this development.

community focused schools grant. Whilst the report recognised that the grant "has enabled local authorities and schools to build on their existing practice, and has provided the stimulus for some worthwhile initiatives and developments", it questions the impact the funding has had.

The next three years provide an opportunity to build on the experience and lessons learnt so far and to lay the foundations to continue beyond 2011. It should not be seen as an initiative which just relies on the grant funding. The School Effectiveness Framework recognises that community focused schools have an important contribution to make to improve children's and young people's learning and well-being. The need to change culture and ways of working will underpin success.

We need further debate to understand how all schools can become community focused. However, unless everyone who has a role in developing community focused schools can say by 2011 that they are really starting to make a difference to the lives of our children and young people, their families, and their communities, we will have missed a valuable opportunity.

Pam Boyd is Executive Director of the community learning organisation ContinYou Cymru www.continyou.org.uk The Estyn report Provision of community-focused services and facilities by schools can be accessed at www.estyn.gov.uk. ContinYou Cymru has also published Turning the vision into reality: The role of Out of School Hours Learning and Community Focused Schools in raising standards (2008).



seductive option

marcus longley asks whether the latest NHS Wales re-structuring proposal will fare better than all the others

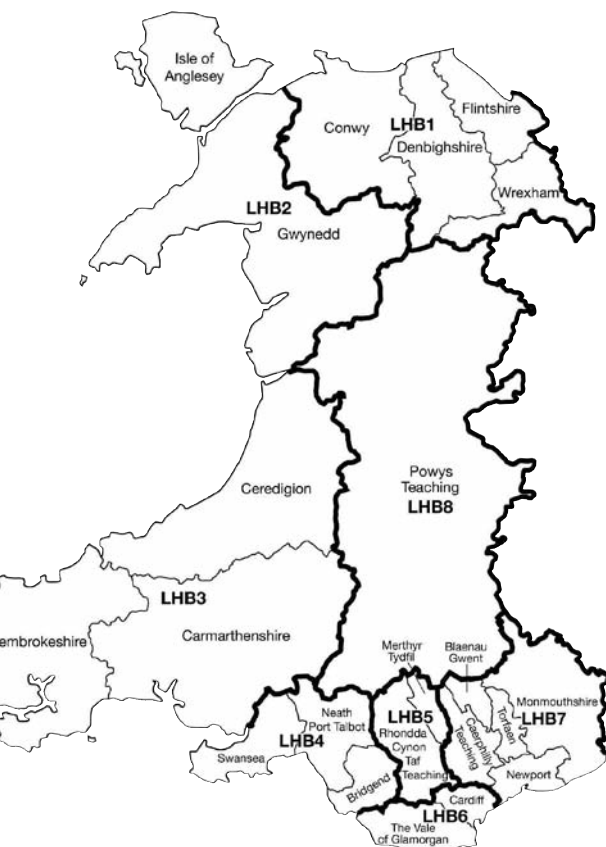
As a headline, 'Welsh NHS to be Re-structured' has about as much dramatic impact as 'Small South American Earthquake: No Welshman Injured'. But perhaps we should pay attention this time, since the NHS in Wales is about to embark on what could be one of its more significant changes. Depending upon one's definition, this is something like the sixth or seventh reorganisation in the past three decades, and the second in the past five years. What is it designed to achieve, and will it fare any better than the others?

Back in the 1950s, Cambridge economist Claude W. Guillebaud conducted one of the first reviews of the NHS and concluded rather whimsically that "the Service works much better in practice than it looks on paper". The current structure of NHS Wales might attract exactly the opposite verdict: it looks quite good in theory, but has failed the test of practice.

The current structure divides NHS Wales into two. On one side are seven NHS Trusts, responsible for providing hospital and community health services in the different parts of Wales, and two specialist NHS Trusts, one for ambulances and the other for cancer services. On the other side are 22 Local Health Boards, responsible for primary health care (GPs, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists) and for 'commissioning' the services of the Trusts. This division is a legacy of the Conservatives' internal market in healthcare which, ironically, Labour first pledged to abolish when it came to power back in 1997.

It is the Local Health Boards which have come in for most criticism. We have so many of them simply because they were designed to be coterminous with local authorities. This was felt to be important because the relationship with local government was thought to be key to greater integration of health and social services. Co-terminosity was considered necessary to ensure that the NHS and local government worked together to tackle the root causes of ill health and the health inequalities which so disfigure 21st century Wales.

But the Local Health Boards are now generally regarded as being too small for commissioning, and don't have sufficient 'clout' to make the Trusts do what they want. The theory was fine – and indeed this emphasis on joint working attracted significant praise. But slow progress in re-balancing hospital and community provision – a key element in the future sustainability of the NHS – sounded their death knell. This is despite the fact that many of them have actually forged good relationships with much of the primary care sector for which they are also responsible.



Current and future Local Health Boards: the heavy lines showing the borders of the eight new Boards proposed in the initial consultation. Since then Health Minister Edwina Hart has proposed merging the boards with the seven Health Trusts to create eight single tier NHS authorities.

The latest proposed re-structuring starts from the commitment in the Labour-Plaid Cymru 'One Wales' manifesto to "move purposefully to end the internal market". This translates into abolishing commissioning, and therefore the Local Health Boards as currently constituted. The Government's proposals also envisage:

- Creation of a National Board for NHS Wales, to provide overall direction.
- Reduction in the number of Local Health Boards from 22 to 8, and a significant change of role.
- Transfer of community services – district nurses, health visitors – from the Trusts to the enlarged Local Health Boards.
- New ways of working for the Boards and Trusts to improve their local accountability.

These proposals open up a debate about governance arrangements at all levels, with some discussion on new ways of engaging Welsh citizens and patients in making the big decisions about the future shape of services. England is developing 'Foundation Trusts', many of which have attracted 10,000 or so local residents to become 'members' of the Trust. They elect Governors with real power over the local management, and engage in other ways in the work of the Trust. In Scotland, there is talk of direct elections to Health Boards.

The consultation suggests that we can learn from these developments. So does it envisage real delegation of power in health services from Cardiff Bay to the regions of Wales?

It certainly talks a lot about 'localism'. However, there is little reason to believe that further devolution is the aim. Accountability to the Minister remains key. But which decisions will be made by the Minister, and which will be deliberately delegated to the NHS?

In England there has been talk about creating an NHS 'Constitution' which would insulate detailed decision-making from political interference. Ministers would set strategic goals – for example, on waiting times, efficiency targets, and patient safety – but the NHS Board would be responsible for deciding *how* they should be met. The parallel is with the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee, which has sole responsibility for deciding interest rates, in order to meet the government's inflation target.

This approach finds little support from the Welsh Assembly Government. It would appear that the Minister has no desire for a self-denying ordinance when it comes to the NHS. It is argued that Welsh politics is incompatible with such abstinence. Voters simply would not accept any Ministerial no-go areas in the Welsh NHS.

One of the many difficulties in health policy lies in reconciling the various different desirable aims and objectives, and prioritising them. The rule is: you can't achieve everything within the resources available, so you have to choose what matters most.

The same thing applies to re-structuring health services. Form should follow function. The previous structure was designed to bring health and local authorities together – hence the 22 Local Health Boards. What is this latest one for?

It appears to be in large part about improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health care, based on the notion that rational planning and co-operation between clinicians and managers in the NHS are the best ways of doing this. This means:

- No internal market.
- Fewer, larger health bodies with discrete areas of responsibility (not one commissioning the other).
- A national framework which will determine overall service delivery arrangements.

Changing structures can, of course, be all too seductive for politicians. It is one of the few areas in the complicated world of health policy where change can be made at the stroke of a pen. And it's of all-consuming interest to health service managers and others, because their jobs are on the line. But we shouldn't forget that structures fit for purpose are *necessary* for change, but not *sufficient* on their own. It's important in the coming months to give equal attention to the even more problematic issue of Incentives. In a nutshell, how can you incentivise the hundreds of decision-makers in the NHS to make the sometimes very tough decisions that are required to change the service for the better. Now that's a really tricky area of policy.

It is accepted by all shades of political opinion that the NHS in Wales is unsustainable in the long-term unless there is major change. In terms of the health of the nation, this means getting people to live more healthily. And for health services, it means shifting healthcare in two directions simultaneously. At the specialist end, we need to move away from too many local general hospitals towards fewer, more specialised centres. Meanwhile, at the generalist end, we need to provide much more care in, or near to, people's own homes. Achieving this also requires a new relationship between the NHS and Welsh patients and citizens, one based on greater mutual understanding.

This re-structuring could help with each element of this agenda. Indeed, if it doesn't, what is it actually for? Observers will therefore wish to ponder two things. Has the Assembly Government identified the right priorities for its re-structuring? And is their approach to running a public service likely to work? If not, we'll be doing this all over again in another few years.

Marcus Longley is Professor of Applied Health Policy and Acting Director, Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of Glamorgan. The IWA and Health Academy Wales's response to the consultation can be accessed on our website www.iwa.org.uk



healthy cities

dyfed wyn huws
argues that improving
public health is
distorted by the
dominance of secondary
care NHS Trusts
in Wales

the World Health Organisation's European Healthy Cities programme stresses the impact of economic regeneration on improving health, and underlines the importance of political action at the local level. It is significant, therefore, that several Welsh local authorities, supported by the Welsh Local Government Organisation, are applying to join the European Healthy Cities network.

Senedd architect Richard Rogers, a member of the UK government's 1998 Urban Task Force, summarised the Healthy Cities approach in his book *Cities for a Small Country*:

"Socially-balanced neighbourhoods do not appear as a result of market forces; indeed markets tend to polarise unequal neighbourhoods rather as they polarise incomes. They have to be constructed and designed ...cities such as Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Freiburg and Strasbourg – which have seen bike journeys double in ten years – show how easily cycling can be extended ...Other European countries have a far higher rate of cycle use than Britain ...Cities that have introduced pedestrian areas, cycle routes and have controlled traffic have benefited economically."

However, mainstreaming health improvement in Wales along these lines has been disappointing to date. There has been almost no routine health impact assessment of major non-health care sector policies and strategies at national or local levels. The Wales Spatial Plan and the new transport strategy are major examples. Instead, health improvement has been limited to numerous scattered small projects using time-limited grant monies, for example on screening and immunisation.

The 2003 NHS Wales reforms promised to implement the WHO Healthy Cities programme using the 22 health, social care and well-being partnerships, led by the 22 unitary authorities and Local Health Boards. However, key elements of the WHO Healthy Cities approach were missing from the 2003 NHS reforms. This meant health improvement in non-health care sectors were not mainstreamed in most localities. Public health, and primary and community health and social care, were trumped yet again by secondary and tertiary medical care.

In the event the 2003 NHS reforms resulted in the highly centralised non-statutory National Public Health Service, with some resources, but without a board. It is a directorate within a clinical NHS Trust and duplicated the role of the pre-existing Wales Centre for Health which itself had few resources.

The National Public Health Service concentrates on counting infectious disease cases, national report writing on selected issues, advising on the quality and commissioning of mainly secondary and tertiary health care services at the national level, and the administration of some national health promotion initiatives on single issues. Most of its resources and power are in centrally directed teams, rather than within local public health departments with close links to local government and local health boards.

Local public health directors are provided by the National Public Health Service, but to only some of the 22 Local Health Boards and then on a part-time basis. To this day, many Local Health Boards do not have an appropriately qualified local public health director.

Despite our poor health status, Wales has fewer public health specialists per head of population than most of the rest of Britain. Worse, the roles of local public health directors are caught between the statutory public health duties of Local Health Boards, local government and local partnerships, and the centralising tendencies of the National Public Health Service, their employer. For instance, they do not have the resources to provide an independent annual report of their county's health status. Neither can they easily influence and call upon timely resources and information from the National Public Health Service.

The WHO Healthy Cities approach advocates adapting local structures to facilitate local collaboration for health improvement. But, unlike in other European countries, our local government and Local Health Boards here have little statutory power to do so. In an ideal world we should be providing local structures that:

- Prioritise local public health leadership and resources.
- Maintain co-terminosity between local government and local health organisations.
- Remove the current bias towards secondary care led services by the NHS Trusts, and prioritise and integrate primary and community care in local planning.
- Prioritise local joint planning for health improvement.
- Enable local partnerships to collaborate for health regionally, nationally and internationally.
- Ensure citizen, political, and professional and technical involvement in local health planning

However, the Assembly Government's proposed 2008 NHS reforms to create a National Health Board and reduce the number of Local Health Boards from 22 to eight, placing them alongside the existing eight Health Trusts, make almost no reference to public health.

Meanwhile, there is a separate year-old consultation regarding public health, concerned mainly with the rationalising of central public health bodies. Moreover, this public health review has no brief to consider public health at the local level where the major deficit exists. Neither the public health review nor the 2008 NHS reforms consider how public health can be integrated horizontally into local structures, even though public health is prioritised in the *One Wales* coalition document.

The demise of the role of the director of public health with the consequent decline of public health influence at the local level is very evident since the 2003 NHS reorganisation. Vital the role of the public health director should be a base in the local NHS with corporate level access to local government and an ability to speak independently on health issues. The introduction of a statutory requirement for an annual independent report from the director of public health would be timely.

The predominance of the NHS Trusts remains in Wales even though they are in essence left over from the internal market. They will distort the proposed 2008 NHS reforms, threatening the much needed Healthy Cities approach, and primary and community care. It is time they went, so that we have unified local NHS organisations that plan, integrate and deliver primary, community and secondary care, with local government, along with being a source of public health influence.

Dr Dyfed Wyn Huws, a freelance consultant in public health, is Honorary Research Fellow at the Department of Primary Care and Public Health, Cardiff University.

vacant properties

steve jones provides an insider's response to a new report on the Welsh rural housing crisis

At the launch of the Rowntree Rural Housing Commission's report in June, its Chairman, Derec Llwyd Morgan, former Principal of Aberystwyth University, said its recommendations, summarised in the panel overleaf, should not be viewed as a menu of items to be selectively chosen. Instead, they should be regarded as an inter-related whole. In her response the Assembly Government's Housing Minister, Jocelyn Davies, stressed the following points:

- The credit crunch should not be an excuse for complacency.
- The Assembly Government's commitment of £200,000 to a Rural Housing Development Scheme, matched by the Welsh Local Government Association and Community Housing Cymru, to expand Rural Housing Enabler posts across Wales.
- The need for rural local authorities to collaborate and have clear appropriate policies at local level.
- The imminent Assembly Government guidance on Section 106 planning agreements, in which local authorities require a proportion of affordable homes in return for granting permission for new housing development.
- The importance of the new requirement for local authorities to produce local affordable housing delivery plans.

It was a detailed speech and to her credit, the Minister stayed on afterwards for a good thirty minutes to answer questions on the validity of reliance on Section 106 agreements when developers are mothballing sites due to a market downturn. She also dealt with questions on the Assembly Government's decision not to continue funding the Homebuy scheme, and on the need for a network of Rural Enablers across Wales.

A cynical view would be that the Government have yet again passed the poison housing chalice to local authorities which are already facing budget cuts and as a result have inadequate

A boarded-up empty school in Llanwrst in the Conwy Valley in north Wales. This is being redeveloped into a multi-functional site, according to the plan shown overleaf.



Plan of the re-developed site at Llanrwst which includes purpose-built extra care apartments, a restaurant, shop, a doctors' surgery, a community building and leisure facilities.

resources to use their statutory and discretionary powers. There is relatively little new money. When it finally arrives on local planning officers' desks the Section 106 guidance will be too late, given the market downturn. Those local authorities which have already used Section 106 agreements effectively have reaped the benefits for their local communities. Those that haven't will have lost a major opportunity. And to cap it all, local authorities now have to write and consult on yet another statutory plan.

A week later, at a meeting of the Community Housing Cymru and local authority Rural Housing Network in Welshpool, it was unsurprising to see the frustration and cynicism of some of the battle-weary local authority affordable housing officers.

However, the pragmatic consensus was that the detailed action already within each local authority's local housing strategy could be re-modelled and presented in the form of the newly required affordable housing delivery plan. This can be done quickly, and allow action to move on to delivery, taking up the gauntlet thrown down by both the Rowntree report and the Minister.

For it is possible to address every one of the Rowntree Commission's recommendations. A plan of action should be encompassed within a local affordable housing delivery plan, signed up to by a rainbow alliance of statutory, private and voluntary sector parties, which commits each of them to delivering solutions to rural problems. One option would be to take the delivery plan through the new Service Boards for each local authority area. This would ensure a high level of ownership by the partners involved. These new Boards are usually where the movers and shakers from each sector are found. Why not give them something which requires real joined-up partnership working, and use their skill, experience and influence to unblock the obstacles and deliver results?

There are examples of the type of joined-up partnership working that is needed, with the Rural Housing Enabler Pilots a good place to start. Take Gwynedd, where the pilot Rural Housing Enabler, hosted by Cymdeithas Tai Eryri and supported by Gwynedd Council, has helped to deliver over 78 affordable units, with 55 additional ones currently being developed. The strong partnership behind the pilot brought together planning, housing, economic development directorates, two local housing associations, and the Snowdonia National Park, to

Joseph Rowntree Foundation Rural Housing Commission's main findings and recommendations

- Better use should be made of the current housing stock – there are up to 18,000 vacant properties in rural areas, a higher number than second homes and holiday homes in Wales. The proportion of vacant properties is higher than the Welsh average in seven out of the nine Welsh rural local authorities.
- The Assembly Government should develop and promote good practice guides for local authorities on how to bring vacant properties back into use.
- The regulation of the Housing Association sector should allow greater private borrowing for increased provision of new affordable homes and the purchase of vacant homes where they can be brought up to the required standard for use.
- A significant proportion of second-home council tax should be used by rural authorities to respond to housing needs in their areas. Specifically, a proportion of these receipts, matched by national funding, should fund a network of at least twelve rural housing enablers.
- Local authorities should jointly fund specialist housing and planning staff, to help ensure they use the planning system more innovatively and effectively.
- Local authorities should establish a more proactive dialogue with private developers, Housing Associations and others through local housing partnerships.
- A database of public land that has the potential to be developed should be established to promote affordable housing.
- The Assembly Government should develop a single definition of housing need and affordability and a single methodology for calculating them. It should compile evidence of need to plug key gaps. New national housing policies should be tailored to rural conditions. National planning policy should be reviewed to ensure it encourages innovation and local flexibility.
- The Social Housing Grant distribution formula should be revised to take better account of local housing and planning needs in rural Wales.



A mixture of low-cost bungalows and houses being developed by Clwyd Alyn Housing Association in Tremeirchion, near St Asaph in north Wales.

guide the work of the Rural Housing Enabler and the Council's Affordable Housing Officer. This excellent example of partnership working is delivering results in areas of extreme housing pressure. In addition, the Rural Housing Enabler has supported two local communities to establish local Community Land Trusts.

There are other examples of housing associations working effectively with local authorities, community councils, and the voluntary and private sectors. Clwyd Alyn Housing Association has worked in partnership with Denbighshire County Council to deliver a mixture of bungalows for rent, and family houses for low cost home ownership in the village of Tremeirchion. This scheme was helped by a philanthropic local businessman who purchased the land and also provided a cash subsidy.

In Flintshire, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association has worked in partnership with Flintshire County Council to bring an empty listed former Coco house in Bagillt back into use as six affordable apartments. The Council's Conservation Officer and Cadw were enlisted to ensure this historic village property was sensitively restored.

In Conwy, the first rural extra care scheme for frail elderly people is being built in Llanrwst in the heart of the Conwy valley. An empty village school site with a mixture of beautiful listed historic buildings and 1970s functional blocks are being transformed into a multi-functional site consisting of purpose built extra care apartments, with a restaurant, shop, a multi-disciplinary social services and local health service office, a re-located doctors surgery, a community building, and leisure facilities. This could well be the best example yet of rural regeneration in Wales. It is the result of several years of strong

partnership working between Conwy County Council housing, social care, planning, local health board, community groups and a local GP practice.

The Rowntree Commission's report refers to an estimated 51,000 empty properties in Wales, of which up to 18,000 properties lie in rural areas. Bringing even a small proportion of these back into use could make a major contribution to delivering the Assembly Government's goal of an additional 6,500 homes by 2011. How can this be achieved within current resource constraints?

The answer partly lies in the good practice examples developed in the early nineties during the last downturn in the housing market and homelessness crisis. The Empty Homes Agency, a charity set up in England in 1992 to campaign for the re-use of empty properties to provide affordable homes for the homeless (see www.emptyhomes.com) has spearheaded this work. Along the way it produced some embarrassing statistics pointing to central government agencies as the biggest owners of empty properties.

Whatever the reasons why an individual property remains empty, there will nearly always be a way of bringing it back into use. Clwyd Alyn Housing Association has worked closely with Flintshire County Council for nearly ten years in an empty homes partnership. Using a carrot and stick approach, this has persuaded private sector owners to allow the regeneration of vacant properties. It has used discretionary renovation grants, either by themselves or with technical assistance from Clwyd Alyn, to provide much needed homes to local homeless persons on the council's housing register. They have been managed either by the owners themselves, or more usually by Clwyd Alyn under a five year lease arrangement. Additional powers in the 2004 Housing Act, enabling local

The listed former Coco house in Bagillt, near Holywell in north Wales, re-developed into six affordable apartments by Clwyd Alyn Housing Association.



authorities to issue 'Empty Property Management Orders', have put an extra tool in the tool box. However, as with anti-social behaviour orders, the Government has complained that local authorities have not been taking advantage of it.

What are the main ingredients of a successful strategy to ensure that empty properties in rural Wales are brought back into use? The main excuse explaining why local authorities are not using their strategic planning, housing, economic development, and regulatory/enforcement powers to tackle the issue is a lack of resources – usually frontline officers on the ground.

Of course, there are always a finite level of resources for any policy initiative. It is a question of priorities. Effective allocation of scarce resources requires evidence-based policy and clear leadership. The experience of Clwyd Alyn Housing Association's successful empty homes partnership with Flintshire County Council has shown that a combination of political leadership, with the council appointing an Empty Homes Officer, and a tenacity of approach by frontline officers, tracking down absent landlords/owners as far away as Australia, will deliver successful outcomes.

Leadership also needs to be demonstrated by the Welsh Assembly Government. This should include a political commitment to implement all of the recommendations of the Rowntree Commission's report, the adoption of a flexible approach, and the delivery of joined-up government. A flexible approach should include a presumption for saying 'yes' to requests from local authorities and housing associations for innovative approaches to a problem to be piloted. In addition, I would suggest that the following initiatives should be implemented:

- The Assembly Government should appoint a national champion to work with local authorities, the voluntary sector

and land-owners to oil the wheels of change – in the same way that a government-funded homelessness consultancy assisted local authorities struggling with high levels of homelessness.

- Local authorities should use the local Service Boards to identify a high profile political champion to give strong leadership to their staff, and the private and voluntary sector partners.
- Clear targets should be included within the new affordable Housing Delivery Plans. The example of Gwynedd's Rural Housing Enabler Project should be used to create a high profile partnership to deliver the plan's targets within clearly defined timescales.
- Housing Associations and voluntary sector organisations should be embraced as change agents, working with community councils to unblock obstacles and build a community consensus for delivering vibrant sustainable rural economies.
- The All Wales Rural Housing Group should become the quarterly meeting point for the proposed expanded Rural Housing Enabler Network. It would provide an opportunity for academics from the Wales Rural Observatory, senior civil servants from the Assembly Government, and local authority and voluntary sector representatives to meet to discuss ideas and progress.

After thirty years of practical experience in the local government and voluntary housing sector I remain hopeful that the best is yet to come. It is time for local partnerships to illuminate the path the Welsh Assembly Government needs to take to deliver the Rowntree Commission's recommendations which, after all, are a major part of the *One Wales* vision.

Steve Jones is Director of Community Services with the Pennaf Housing Group in Denbighshire.

invisible minority

dewi owen speaks up for refugees in Wales

For the past five years I have been working with refugees in Wales and am always surprised how many people perceive that they are some sort of cancerous, uncontrollable growth eating away at our society. Those that perpetuate this myth have not met or know any refugees and yet deem themselves to be experts on the matter.

A decade ago Vaughan Robinson, Professor of Geography at Swansea University and a specialist in international migration and its consequences, said, "Refugees in Wales are an invisible minority". Contrary to what is published in the tabloid press, this has not changed.

What often puzzles me is how opinionated people often are about this minority, especially considering there is not much data available. I daily come across reactions like:

"When they come here they get given cars and houses for free. I don't have anything against them but there are just too many of them here. I'm not racist but I'm not happy that my taxes are spent on them."

The facts are that asylum seekers are provided with initial emergency accommodation, some money to survive, but no cars or houses. Less than 0.001 per cent of our taxes are spent on them.

Typically, the public are confused about the difference between refugees, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, and migrant workers. So, for example, people often class Poles and other eastern Europeans as refugees, even though those who come to Britain to work do so under European Union free movement of labour rules. Even educated people often have misconceptions and misunderstandings about the differences between these social groups.

During the 20th Century refugees arrived from the Basque country when General Franco was bombing villages in northern Spain in the 1930s. In the 1940s Poles and some Jews arrived from German occupied Europe. In the 1970s the Vietnam boat people arrived in our midst, and in the 1980s the Somali and other nationalities began arriving from troubled parts of the world.

Asylum seekers are dispersed throughout the UK. Those coming to Wales are sent to our four main cities – Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham – where they remain until the Border and Immigration Authority decides on the validity of their claim. Contrary to popular opinion, asylum seekers are not permitted to work and must wait until their claim is assessed. If they are awarded refugee status they may stay in Wales until things improve in their country, or they may remain indefinitely.

On current estimates there are about 3,000 asylum seekers and 8,000 refugees living in Wales, although even the Border and Immigration Authority cannot be sure of the precise numbers.

With the advent of the Assembly Wales is now establishing national institutions and developing a democracy. As with any



Hawar Ameen,
a refugee from
Iraq who lives
in Cardiff

I was born in Iraq in a city called Sulaimany. My nationality is Kurdish. I came here first when I was a boy of four years old, because my Father was a PhD student who came to Manchester to study in the early 1980s. When he finished his studies we returned to Iraq because at that time there were no difficulties with Saddam Hussain and the ruling Ba'ath party. However, as time progressed the situation became intolerable for the Kurdish minority in Iraq, where nearly half a million of us were savagely slaughtered. My family and I were forced to find sanctuary in a refugee camp in Iran for seven months.

Then we claimed asylum in Britain and lived in Chester. I was twelve when I moved there. I found it very difficult at first because there were very few ethnic minorities in the area. Later I came to Wales where my father found employment in the University of Glamorgan as an Applied Statistician.

I felt more at home here in Wales than across the border in England. I immediately identified with the people in Wales. We have a parallel history. We have been conquered by another race, and our identity, language and culture has been oppressed by a larger imperialistic culture. Also, with its hills and mountains the landscape and geography of Wales remind me so much of my homeland in Kurdistan. I found the people here to be tolerant and welcoming.

Did you support the action of the US and the coalition in the invasion of Iraq?

Yes I did at first because Saddam Hussein was a terrible dictator, who treated my people with savage cruelty. The West supported him initially, and even supplied him with arms. However, since then I understand that the West's intentions were purely financial and not based on moral grounds as the political leaders would lead you to believe.

What have you learnt from living in Wales? If you were one day to return to Kurdistan what would you take with you?

I have learnt that there are better systems here. If you want something in Kurdistan you can get it through corruption or through the back door, but this is wrong and weakens a country in the long term. In Wales there is the rule of law that protects people's rights, as well as democratic systems that work really well.

Would you wish to see an Assembly like the one we have in Wales?

We all ready have the equivalent of the Welsh Assembly in the Kurdish area of Iraq. The area is safer now. We still have problems such as a lack of basic services like clean water. Such infrastructure problems affect the rest of Iraq as well as the Kurdish regions. But we are heading in the right direction.

What do you say to those who assert that we take in too many refugees in Wales?

I believe that Wales and Britain have a moral obligation to help those who are being persecuted. At the same time I understand there may be a drain on resources. There are certain myths that are perpetuated by the tabloid press that Britain takes on most of the world's refugees and that the island is sinking under the volume. Of course, this is not true at all. Wales has only a few thousand refugees. And we are able to contribute to the building of the country.

Do you think that the asylum system should be devolved from London?

I think this would only work if Wales was an independent country and able to control its own borders.

civilised country we have an obligation to offer the hand of friendship and support to those who have lost their homes, who have been tortured for following their religious or political conscience, or who have simply being born into a persecuted ethnic group.

Surely this is the Welsh way. This is what the Chartists fought for when they marched on Newport. This is in line with the Nonconformist radical tradition in which our forbears were imprisoned and lost their property because they simply asked

for freedom to believe. This is what the north Wales quarrymen and the miners of the south stood for when they created the Union movement and established Eisteddfods and libraries. So today we should be willing to reach out the hand of friendship, empathise, and help those who are the most vulnerable social group in our society.

Dewi Owen is Housing Development Manager with the Welsh Refugee Council.

simon roberts casts
an eye over the IWA's
report on Wales's press
and broadcasting

democratic deficit

the IWA's May 2008 report, *Media in Wales: Serving Public Values*, provides a vital statistical breakdown of our profound information deprivation and its political significance. The depressingly familiar charge of the media's responsibility for a democratic deficit through lack of coverage is lent a sharper, more persuasive focus by the report's broad scope, examining newspapers, television, radio and online provision in Wales. Such context has often been lost by previous studies which have looked at aspects of the media in Wales in relative isolation.

The report is given extra relevance and impetus by coming hot on the heels of Ofcom's second review of public service broadcasting. This offers a variety of approaches to the reshaping of public service provision as we move towards full digital switchover. The IWA's report, in effect an audit of the press and broadcasting consumed in Wales, is designed to complement the Ofcom report. It documents what might be termed the ecology of Welsh broadcasting by deliberately placing it in the wider context of the total media in Wales, including the Welsh and UK press. It is right to do this since when considering future broadcasting policy; the totality of the media picture and its deficiencies needs to be understood.

The importance of the media's role in creating a sense of community and encouraging political and civic engagement in our infant democracy has long been recognised by both political and academic communities. Many would argue that this role is particularly vital in the context of the fragmented cultural geography of Wales. In post-devolution Scotland, studies suggest that the mass ritual of reading specifically Scottish newspaper titles continues to contribute to the construction of the national community. In recent interviews conducted by media researchers, London journalists express the view that since the Scots have their own parliament so too they have their 'own news' and their own newspapers to carry it. Indeed, the fact that debate in Scotland now tends to focus on the diminishing Scottish content in London-based newspapers neatly illustrates the double deficiency faced by the Welsh public.

Geraint Talfan Davies, Chair of the IWA and joint author of the report with the IWA's Research Officer Nick Morris, encapsulated this key post-devolution contrast when speaking

at an IWA/Ofcom public consultation in Llandudno in June 2008 on the future of Welsh broadcasting. As he said, "What hit me harder than any other statistic in this review is that of the 3.75 million newspaper readers in Scotland, only 100,000 read newspapers without Scottish content. In Wales, however, 1,760,000 are reading newspapers with virtually no Welsh content. It seems impossible to argue that those figures do not have serious consequences for informed democracy in Wales."

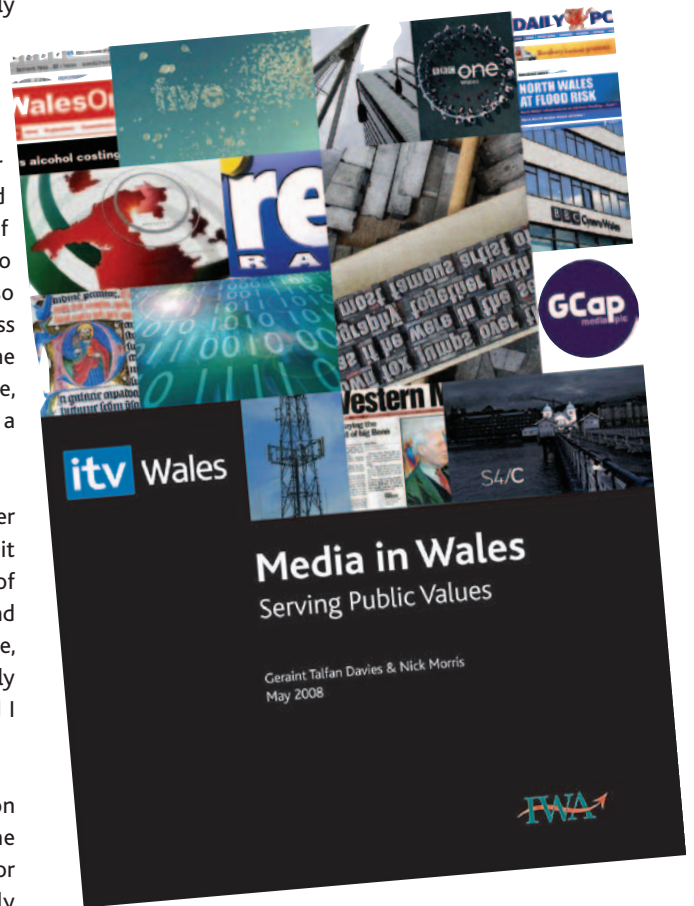
Inevitably, the nature of public debate in Wales is adversely affected by the lack of a Welsh national newspaper. The Welsh Mirror's brief and unsuccessful run has been well-documented. Since the paper folded in 2003 no other UK newspaper has attempted to launch a Welsh edition. Yet the UK-wide debate post-devolution has tended to further marginalise Wales. Indeed, the failure of the London-based newspapers to cover devolved politics, and the implications of the lack of an indigenous newspaper industry in Wales fails to register in the rest of the UK. So the democratic deficit so keenly felt within Wales is largely unrecognised outside. Witness the debate sparked by the BBC Trust survey, published in June 2008 criticising the institution's London-centric reportage, which tended to focus on the desirability or otherwise of a separate Scottish evening news bulletin.

Local and regional newspaper titles in Wales are in a healthier state. Their continued vibrancy is often remarked upon, yet it could also be argued that this is simply another symptom of the wider problem: the lack of a truly national newspaper, and the failure of London-based papers to cover Wales. As Rob Irvine, Editor of the *Daily Post*, said at the Llandudno meeting, "It really does feel like there isn't much competition for stories, and I include the broadcasters in that."

The IWA's report argues that the 2007 Assembly election campaign put this in focus. Very little coverage of the campaign could be found in any London-based paper. As for the subsequent formation of the Labour-Plaid Assembly Government, described by the report's authors as "one of the key developments in recent Welsh political history", this was relegated to the 'News in Brief' section of the Independent. Yet, at the same time and along with the rest of the London-based media, that newspaper found space to devote a lengthy feature to another key Welsh story at the time: Shambo the TB-infected bull. Plaid MP Adam Price was forthright in his reaction: "The death of Shambo the bull got more attention by the BBC in 2007 than the fate of Rhodri Morgan and the Welsh nation, which shows what the media thinks of us as a nation."

"What we desperately need in Wales is a much higher input into the top end of journalism," says the IWA report. "Journalism whose intelligence and ambition measures up to the new democratic reality in Wales that we now have the capacity to pass laws to govern ourselves. Taking all media together we are still a long way from that goal." The situation is worsened by the fact that Wales remains rooted to the bottom of the UK table in terms of broadband penetration – of all the UK regions take-up increased least in Wales between 2006 and 2008.

If online media consumption is lower than the UK average, so it follows that reliance on the traditional media is higher. Yet, as the IWA report says, the content fails to live up to that, particularly in terms of political coverage, which makes for profound implications for the Assembly Government's ability to engage with the public. Meanwhile, there is only one UK-wide newspaper reporter based in Wales, representing the *News of the World*, alongside five Press Association staff, from which several London-based papers take their copy.



While acknowledging the commercial imperative of private sector newspapers and broadcasting, the IWA report calls for recognition of their products' role in feeding the information base of Welsh citizens. It rightly argues that this should be taken into account as an issue in its own right and is a vital context for the consideration of Public Service Broadcasting. For the sake of the health of Welsh politics, democracy and society, the report argues that there is a pressing need for ensuring plurality and 'equitable representation' of Welsh issues in both Welsh and English language media based in Wales.

Newspaper journalism should underpin the entire debate on the future of the media and the IWA should be congratulated for bringing it to the fore. The question is not one of circulation, but of influence. Newspapers have a cultural significance and a symbolism that goes far beyond mere readership statistics. Comparisons with Scotland need to be reflected upon. Even when they are merely 'regional' editions of UK papers, the pivotal role that indigenous Scottish newspapers play in the evolving dialogue of devolved Scottish politics deserves wider recognition in Wales.

The weakness of the print environment is also the key reason why Welsh broadcasting is elevated to the position it finds itself in post-devolution Wales. Despite this, there is a further significant democratic deficit. The report refers to the situation in 'overlap areas' of eastern Wales, where Ofcom says 74,100 Welsh households watch 'mostly' England channels. Indeed, in several areas of north-east Wales, residents receive no media output from Wales at all, due to a combination of cultural choice and geographical circumstances. They are subject to the processes of devolution, but how can they engage with those processes in the absence of information about the new Welsh politics?

Wider forces have for some time been changing this broadcasting agenda. As the IWA report states, the force of markets is beginning to influence a broadcasting system conceived and driven by public service values which are, inevitably, more vulnerable than ever before. Ofcom's second review, which was brought forward by two years as an acknowledgement of the urgency of contemporary challenges, has profound relevance in the Welsh context. The need to ensure that the media supports public service values that might not survive in an exclusively market-driven system has particular resonance for Wales, given our wider media shortcomings.

News will remain at the forefront of the debate on ensuring a degree of pluralism in Welsh broadcasting. And because Wales is the only devolved nation whose ITV franchise-holder was absorbed into ITV plc, and the only nation without an indigenously owned commercial radio station, it is therefore also inevitably the country where the BBC is most dominant. "The BBC is the elephant in the room," argued Rob Irvine at the Llandudno consultation. "The BBC might be the cornerstone but it also undermines what everybody else wants to achieve. The prospect of them forcing everyone else out is worrying. There is not enough variety."

It was timely, therefore, for the IWA report to draw attention to the decline of ITV spend in Wales, currently "just over £9m" according to ITV executive chairman, Michael Grade. This figure is substantially less than half that spent by BBC Wales on its English language television provision, and represents a fall of 34 per cent of ITV's total spend on English language output in the nations and regions between 2001 and 2006.

The report identifies English language television as a key issue for the future. While Wales is the only devolved UK nation to have a third public broadcaster, S4C, with institutional autonomy, guaranteed funding and a free-standing spectrum derived from the Welsh language settlement, no such official agreement exists about the nature of English language provision in Wales. Yet it is precisely this that has tended to be overlooked in recent years, partly because investment is decided on by internal processes within the wider BBC and ITV organisations. The report argues that English language television programmes for Wales have become adjuncts to UK network schedules and that, as these schedules have become more competitive, this has acted as a constraint on the diversity of programming offered. It argues that a temporary solution is to guarantee the

current level of ITV investment in Wales, until long-term decisions on the future of the system are ready for implementation.

The key, as Rob Irvine argues, is competition and therefore diversity. A regionally distinctive ITV that can truly compete with the BBC in news and general programming would clearly improve the nature of public debate in Wales, and its future is in many ways key to the debate. The IWA suggests that Ofcom's review might closely study the idea of a Welsh Public Broadcasting Agency that "may become more relevant as technology develops". The IWA has a further intriguing suggestion, to make Welsh ITV a US-style autonomous affiliate of the ITV network outside the current conflated 'England and Wales' system.

It is the reach and impact of services that is the important point here. Competition cannot be allowed to dominate, given the shortcomings of the wider media. The network affiliate concept could be a more appropriate recipient than ITV of any potential future Assembly Government funding. Profit margins might be narrow, but a different ownership model able to prioritise public needs does seem to be necessary in post-devolution Wales.

Few would dispute the assertion that the dominance of the UK press in Wales undermines an informed political culture in a country which suffers from a structurally weak media, particularly as that London-based press seems increasingly uninterested in Welsh politics. Yet the appetite for specific services from within Wales is changing post-devolution. There is an increasing demand and need for a specific Welsh media product, particularly in the English language. It is worth noting that recent research suggests support for devolution is growing most rapidly in those anglicised, English-speaking areas of east Wales that were initially the least enthusiastic. In the context of a weak print environment but growing sense of engagement with the devolutionary project, a new and imaginative approach to public service broadcasting is a necessity. This IWA audit of the Welsh media is seen by its authors as the beginning of a process, not the end. Regular monitoring, they argue, is important if we are to stay ahead of the debate and have some chance of shaping policy.

Simon Roberts is a senior lecturer in Journalism at the University of Chester.



speaking unto nation

BBC Director General Mark Thompson –
“Sometimes we have found that our nations and regions are not quite as forthcoming with the best stories as they might be because they are saving them for their own programmes.”
Evidence to the Assembly Broadcasting Committee, 16 June 2008.

Photo: BBC / Richard Kendal

nick morris unpacks the contradictions in the BBC’s approach to reporting a devolved Britain

the dire position of Wales in the UK’s media was confirmed by two reports published in June 2008. Professor Anthony King produced his assessment of the BBC’s network coverage of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for the BBC Trust and the IWA published *Media in Wales – Serving Public Values*. Citing detailed evidence, both reports highlight inadequate media coverage of Wales that could undermine democratic engagement.

The IWA report found that, in contrast with Scotland, people in Wales consume a very large proportion of their media from UK-wide organisations. In the print medium 2.7 per cent of newspaper readers in Scotland read papers with almost no Scottish content; on the other hand 86.9 per cent of newspaper readers in Wales read papers with almost no Welsh content. Professor King’s report includes evidence collected by the School of Journalism at Cardiff University and BMRB, a market research company. Cardiff University said coverage of the devolved nations was “a tiny part in every day news coverage” and often missed opportunities to report devolved matters, choosing crime and sport instead. While the BBC’s network news coverage was adjudged to be impartial, Professor King said bluntly that the BBC’s network coverage had not responded adequately and appropriately to the devolved UK.

The three nations outside England have 20 to 25 per cent of the audience for BBC network news, which is greater than their collective UK population share of around 16 per cent. Yet, according to Cardiff University’s research (table 1), during a month-long survey only 12 per cent of BBC news stories were

centred around locations *outside* England. Wales's position in the BBC's UK-wide media was far worse than that of Scotland and Northern Ireland, as shown in tables 1 and 2.

Cardiff University's research also identified weaknesses in the quality of coverage:

- 19 per cent of the BBC network's stories involving devolution were vague and confusing or occasionally inaccurate and in a few cases explicitly reported that a story applied to the UK when it did not.
- 136 stories dealt with education and health on the BBC network from October to November 2007 – the two of the three biggest expenditure groups by the Assembly Government – and all 136 dealt only with England.
- Almost nothing of the BBC's 2007 election coverage dealt with Wales, alongside abysmal coverage in London-based newspapers (see table 2).

The chairman of the BBC Trust, Sir Michael Lyons, said:

"The BBC's reporting of the United Kingdom is – on the face of it – much better than what is provided by other broadcasters. But the resounding message from this review is the BBC is falling short of its own high standards and is not meeting properly its core purpose of helping to inform democracy."

Sir Michael's claim about the BBC's superiority should be set against almost non-existent coverage from other broadcasters. At a meeting of the National Assembly's Broadcasting Committee, on June 16 2008, the BBC sought to explain the findings of the report. The BBC's Director-General, Mark Thompson, cited high market research approval ratings in Wales about BBC news output.

However, increased understanding – and not only audience appreciation – should be a consideration. The same market research also revealed misunderstandings in Wales about very broad issues, such as the demarcations of responsibility for Welsh and UK-wide matters. These problems are not, of course, solely the fault of the BBC.

The King report described three interconnected reasons why the BBC might have failed to keep pace with changes in the UK.

These were a lack of positive or negative feedback about stories, combined with the BBC's collective mindset and inertia.

The report noted that during interviews with BBC staff no one mentioned receiving praise or blame arising from the BBC's UK-wide reporting of the devolved nations. The report also commented on the BBC's mindset:

"Most people concerned with news and current affairs at the BBC ...are accustomed to a nation in which almost everything that really matters – politically, culturally, socially, financially – happens in or near London ...The heart of the BBC's news and current affairs operations is still located in or near central London. And its mind still seems to be located there too."



Anthony King – the BBC is "accustomed to a nation in which almost everything that really matters happens in London".

Photo: Roger Taylor / Daily Telegraph

Remedial measures proposed by Professor King are numerous and include monitoring UK news output, greater co-operation between the nations and the network, out-of-London career development for staff, more training, and strengthened editorial policy guidelines. In a preliminary response the BBC's Management agreed with most of Professor King's more

table 1: BBC and non-BBC story locations by media

Media	England	Westminster	N.I.	Scotland	Wales	Total stories by medium
BBC TV	415 (68.9)	140 (23.3)	15 (2.5)	20 (3.3)	12 (2.0)	602
Non-BBC TV	266 (63.5)	128 (30.5)	9 (2.1)	12 (2.9)	4 (1.0)	419
BBC Radio	355 (54.9)	240 (37.1)	9 (1.4)	31 (4.8)	12 (1.9)	647
BBC Online	145 (49.0)	122 (41.2)	10 (3.4)	17 (5.7)	2 (0.7)	296
Total	1,181 (60.1)	630 (32.1)	43 (2.2)	80 (4.1)	80 (1.5)	1,964

table 2: frequency and percentage of BBC's election focus across the four nations

Focus	Frequency	Percentage
England	113	21.0
Northern Ireland	107	19.9
Scotland	143	26.6
Wales	66	12.4
Reference to more than one	108	20.1
Total	537	100

painless suggestions but not the suggestion to move the BBC's news centre outside London.

Editorial and operational considerations militated against the idea, the management said. However, it would consider appointing a UK Editor and would continue with plans to move some operations to Salford, Greater Manchester, which would improve coverage of the north of England. Coverage of devolution in Scotland would also be strengthened, according to the management.

However, there are currently no published plans to improve coverage of Wales. The BBC Management's preliminary response offers little to suggest a significant change in the BBC's culture will come. People in Wales can justifiably feel sceptical about the measures proposed by the BBC so far. The BBC Management promised extensive coverage of the Welsh Assembly election in 2007, yet this was not forthcoming on its UK-wide media.

Professor King mentioned the already controversial option of giving Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast responsibility for integrating the Six O'Clock News with their own news programmes that are currently broadcast at 6:30pm – the 'Welsh Six' – a solution that seems to strike fear into the BBC's management. On this subject Professor King said:

"...the relevant technology will soon be in place and, once it is, it will seem strange, even perverse, not to provide television viewers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with the choices that radio listeners in those three nations have already enjoyed for years. Parallel programming of this kind would obviate any need for UK-wide programmes to devote undue attention to developments of direct interest to viewers in one of the four nations but of no interest at all to most viewers in any of the other three. Parallel programming would also reduce the risk – inherent in the present system of national opt-outs – either of viewers not being told an important story at all or of their being told it twice, once in the UK-wide bulletin and then in the post-bulletin opt-out."

Precedents are already in place in non-news output. The BBC is currently decentralising its network commissioning and is moving some programme strands outside London. A 'Welsh Six' would also deal with an internal BBC problem that Mark Thompson revealed at the National Assembly's Broadcasting Committee. Although he produced no specific evidence, Mr

Thompson said that some BBC news teams in the nations and regions had withheld stories from the network to save material for regional bulletins. BBC Wales rather pointedly denied there was a problem.

UK unionists and Welsh separatists might regard the 'Welsh Six' issue as symbolic. However, the arguments for or against a 'Welsh Six' do not completely belong to either cause. The presence of the highest officials in the BBC Trust and Management at a National Assembly committee, which could have compelled them to attend if necessary, was symbolic of the transformation that has taken place since 1999. If the BBC does not address the deficit of coverage it could inadvertently strengthen the case of the minority who would like to break up of the BBC.

More widely, public service broadcasting is under review by Ofcom, the communications regulator, as part of its statutory duties. Ofcom's second review of public service broadcasting posits four models to ensure the future of television broadcasting across the UK. Although possible 'top slicing' of the licence fee (taking an allocation of the money collected and giving it to alternative PSB providers) is mentioned in funding options, all four models proposed by Ofcom leave the BBC largely untouched. It is incongruous that a review of public service broadcasting in Britain should offer so few ideas for reshaping and strengthening the funding, structure and operation of the BBC to fit twenty first century requirements – digital provision over multiple media, devolved governments and so on.

Aside from value for public money, the imperatives for improvement are captured in the BBC's charter and remits: "building greater understanding of the parliament process and political institutions governing the UK" and "representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities". The BBC Trust should act decisively and quickly, if it wishes to continue its record of informing, educating and entertaining with its news output. However, neither the BBC Trust nor the management have yet to show that they appreciate the severity of the problem, nor the pressures for change that are mounting in Wales and Scotland.

Nick Morris is the IWA's Research Officer and co-author with Geraint Talfan Davies of Media in Wales – Serving Public Values.



internet liberation

Golwg website's home page, being re-developed with £200,000 help from the Assembly Government.

dylan iorwerth explains how the news magazine Golwg will be using Assembly Government support to expand its presence on the web

When a revolutionary means of communication first appears, it tends to mimic what has gone before and practitioners struggle to realise the new medium's potential. Early printed books at first worked in similar ways to manuscripts; early radio broadcasts were scripted as literary pieces; and television was radio with pictures.

The internet, too, has been in that phase. We all set up our websites and then dumped on them the electronic versions of our existing publications.

Just as printing changed the arrangement of information on a page, we are now beginning to see how the digital media moves in many ways at once. There seems to be a clearer idea of what the new media can do best and, for a small non-profit sharing company like *Golwg*, working in a minority Welsh language market within a massive English one, the time is ripe for striking out into the new world.

In that sense, the Welsh Assembly Government's announcement of an additional £200,000 a year towards developing the Welsh language press was well-timed, despite the regret that the idea of a daily newspaper had been lost. For us, along with financial restrictions, talk of a Welsh-language daily and the fear of hampering that development had put a rein on any important new initiatives.

Despite the fact that £200,000 will cover far less than half of the annual costs, the development money offered a platform for building a new service. In line with *Golwg's* strategy over the past 20 years, we aim to use public money to build something that is much larger than the grant would ever finance.

New media seldom completely replace earlier forms. Calligraphy still has its uses and its own appeal. So, when pitching for the money, one of our main arguments was our

ability to combine a fresh service with the development of our weekly news and current affairs magazine.

Placing the more transient, interactive and immediate elements of our work on a web platform will liberate *Golwg*, the magazine, to do what print does best – the articles that have a slower turnover time, the investigative and analytical stories, the colour pieces and features. Alongside the public investment in the new service, we will be investing tens of thousands of our own money in the magazine.

As well as talking about his famous “global village”, Marshal McLuhan also mentioned “a simultaneous happening”. Over the centuries – or millennia for that matter – the story of communication is also the story of acceleration. Each new technology has meant a faster delivery and we need to select the elements that make best use of the latest leap forward.

Within the Welsh-speaking cultural world, there has still been a need to make the case for using the new media and for taking the long-term view of the movement of readers and business from paper to screen. Journalism on the internet is still not seen by many as ‘proper writing’ or real reading matter.

Eventually, though, the main considerations are practical. Internet publishing avoids many of the difficulties that have hampered the Welsh-language press over the past few decades – the cost and labour-intensity of conventional printing and the cumbersome, patchy, nature of all-Wales distribution. Comparatively low circulations and incomes can make these difficulties almost insurmountable for traditional print publications.

So, the new media provide fresh opportunities for a small culture. We hope the new service will help us achieve many of the ambitions we have long harboured to tailor material for local markets, to offer various levels of reading material, and to reach directly to particular groups, from farmers to urban youth.

Taken individually, the constituent parts of our new service are not particularly ground-breaking in the wider world. Its uniqueness, we think, will be in the combination of different elements and the way they tap in to the character of Welsh-language culture. This is not an alternative or a replacement for a daily newspaper, working as it will through a medium where the words ‘paper’ and ‘daily’ don’t mean much. This is a different concept, which can provide a platform for commerce and culture as well as news – a virtual Eisteddfod field.

The core – the ‘Pavilion’ – will be news and current affairs, created, compiled and edited by professional journalists working to the standards expected of the traditional media. Our aim will be to provide a rolling service with regular updates written specifically for the web. *Golwg*’s journalists will break and contribute original stories that can be developed further in the magazine.

Local newspapers have continued to flourish financially because they meet commercial and cultural needs. Our service will have to do the same. In this way our site can offer different options

to the highly respected *Cymru’r Byd* news site run by BBC Cymru. A successful newspaper survives by creating a readership which others can access for different purposes. An internet service is no different.

Many traditional adverts will still work best in traditional print. This was the lesson of the first few imitative years of banner-ad websites. Now there is an increasing awareness that the new medium provides new opportunities, both for business transactions and for imparting public service messages. Moving images, sound and interactivity can offer more immediate and direct ways of reaching an audience.

Another possible historical interpretation is that new developments have increasingly brought closer together the means of communication and the commercial use made of them. With the Internet, they are as one. For a language sector where such opportunities have been constantly constrained, *Golwg*’s new service could be liberating. We intend to develop innovative ways for both businesses and public bodies to make use of the new service to meet their own needs, at both national and local level.

The key will be a wide range of content, provided by ourselves, and by public and commercial ‘stallholders’ in an ‘open field’ where people can share views and chat and do their own thing. A Maes B – a separate field for young people – will be vital, where oldies should fear to tread. Getting sport coverage right will also be crucial.

The great challenge for modern mainstream Welsh-language media has been to try and please everyone in a market that is too small to segment. For once, being all things to all people is a major strength. Readers can design and redesign their own service, opting in and out of the parts they want to visit, while contributing their own content too, if they wish to do so.

In this way, we hope that many more people will use the professional Welsh press in its electronic form than do so through print. Different language styles become possible and the correct content could overcome many people’s reluctance to read Welsh, as *papurau bro* – the network of community newspapers – have done.

Many of these ideas are in an embryonic state and some may fall by the wayside as the forthcoming months of preparation force priorities on us. But the ambition is there, equal in scale, we hope, to any daily paper.

Over the years, because of regulation or market forces, the Welsh language has lagged behind in the communication race. We are a century or so behind English with books, about a decade with radio and television. With the internet there is at least the chance of arriving more or less on time.

Dylan Iorwerth is Managing Editor of the Lampeter-based weekly magazine Golwg.

daniel williams introduces
a new biography of
raymond williams,
revealing how central he
remains to twenty first
century Wales

warrior's tale

theodor Adorno's characteristically aphoristic statement that "the past life of the émigré is, as we know, annulled" once seemed particularly apt when considering Raymond Williams. In his assessment of Williams's criticism John Higgins was typical of many in making no mention of Wales, and he compounded this omission in his *Raymond Williams Reader* by symptomatically mistitling Williams's unfinished fictional exploration of the history of human settlement on his native Black Mountains as "People of the Black Country".

Like many others, Fred Inglis, in his peevisish biography of 1995, found it difficult to take Williams's 'late-come Welshness' seriously, dismissing it as 'a fit of the kind of fervour which overcame Williams several times in later life'. While Stefan Collini admired the way Inglis "made no pretence at writing like a visiting anthropologist", and saw Inglis's "emphasis on inwardness" as a legitimate reflection of the fact that biographer and subject were members of the same 'tribe' of intellectuals on the English left, the view from Wales was rather different. Ned Thomas, amongst others, asked rhetorically whether it mattered that Inglis's biography "often seems to get things wrong when it talks about Wales". The errors, argued Thomas, were not due to a "moral shortcoming" but an "objective one":

"Colonials often know more about the metropolis than metropolitans themselves. Metropolitans perceive the colonials (if at all) in single and stereotyped terms. This is how things are. If and when Dai Smith's biography of Raymond Williams appears, we shall expect a more comprehensive treatment, because the Welsh world and the world of the English Left will equally be open to him."

Twelve years later, Dai Smith has produced a seminal biography. And the success of the work is partly due to the fact that the Rhondda-born, Balliol-educated Professor at Swansea University is able to analyse, sympathise, and engage, simultaneously, with the very different tribes to which Williams belonged. *Raymond*

Williams,
photographed
in the early
1960s.



Williams: A Warrior's Tale brings the 'past life' of the Cambridge Professor and European intellectual centre stage. The charge of Williams's opening words in the volume of interviews *Politics and Letters* (1979) – "I am from Pandy" – has been registered at last, and the formative experiences on the Welsh border become, for Smith, the crucial viewfinder for bringing the later life into focus.

Dai Smith sheds new and revealing light on the people, events and commitments of Williams's life up to the publication of *The Long Revolution* in 1961. His unrestricted access to the remarkably rich and revealing family papers have allowed him to use Harry Williams's diary to explore the central relationships between father, mother and son. Interviews with the late Joy Williams, coupled with information gleaned from the Williams papers, shed new light on the development of her relationship with Raymond from courtship to marriage and onwards. Drawing on letters and interviews, there are detailed accounts, too, of Williams's often uneasy friendships with Michael Orrom, Wolf Mankowitz, Clifford Collins and others.

The chapters on the Second World War movingly document the pre-call-up fears of parents and son, Williams's experiences as a front-line officer in an anti-tank regiment in Normandy, and the tensions between his earlier, and later, pacifism and the enduring influence of his military experiences. These accounts of people and events are consistently set within a broader social and political history in which Smith never loses sight of Williams's shifting political allegiances from Labour to Communism to a lasting disillusion with both from the late 1940s onwards. Of course, these are things that we would conventionally expect to find in a biography of this kind. However, *A Warrior's Tales* is also a striking, somewhat unusual, book, both in relation to Dai Smith's other works and in relation to biographical writing more generally.

Smith tells us in his introduction that he has "tried to tell this story, where possible, so that the voice of Raymond Williams, in his own words, can be heard", and one of the characteristics of this biography is the extent, and length, of quoted materials. There are quoted letters and diary entries, as we might expect, but more unusual are the extensive quotations from the unpublished, and often intensely autobiographical, creative writings to which Williams dedicated most of his time from the mid 1940s to 1960. Readers familiar with the later fictional writings will be struck by the extent to which familiar scenes from the 'Welsh Trilogy' – *Border Country* (1960), *Second Generation* (1964), *The Fight for Manod* (1979) – had in fact been composed during the 1950s. The revealing conversation between Peter Owen and two representatives of the 'West African Federation' in *Second Generation*, for example, finds its precursor in the unpublished *Map of Treason* where a conversation concludes with the observation: "Owen? Owen is a Marxist in Africa and Asia, and a liberal in Europe. It is a common enough condition." Indeed, what is most striking about these early fictional works are the ways in which they explore the complex nexus between class and national identity. The Welsh experience is central to these fictional meditations.

It will be far more difficult to follow Inglis in dismissing Williams's 'Welshness' as a 'late-come' fabrication having read scenes such as the extended description of the village eisteddfod in *Border Village* (an earlier draft of the novel *Border Country*) where "everyone

stood to sing the English national anthem, put at the beginning so that at the end, when they were really involved, they could sing the Welsh". The description of the Welsh anthem conveys the strength of national belonging, coupled with the author's sense of confused amazement at the phenomenon being observed:

"For what was final was the response, the simple collective intentness, a hushed silence that yet held all the potency of these sounds ...everyone getting up, standing together, and singing the anthem. Then, within this, it seemed no longer a matter of ordinary senses, but of direct impact on the body – on the skin, on the hair, on the hands. What would anyone make of this, Will wondered, anyone looking down on it amused, if such a one could be found?"

Smith illustrates with copious quotations the constant references to Welshness and the Welsh language in the earlier unpublished novel *Brynnllwyd*, where the central character Martin concludes a conversation with his more nationalistically inclined friend, Gwilym, by declaring that "If I am made to choose between the European tradition and the Welsh, no Celtic tourism will bring me here. The Welsh is a major part of the English tradition, not a cut-price privacy behind a string of castles".

The later, self-defined 'Welsh-European' Williams would see this as a false choice. One intriguing way of thinking about his critical writings on Welshness and the national question from the 1970s onwards – collected in *Who Speaks for Wales?* (2003) – is as an ongoing attempt at reconciling the strands of his formative experiences and writings: Pandy and Normandy; Martin and Gwilym.

If Smith allows Raymond Williams to speak in his own range of voices, the biographer's own voice is deliberately kept in the background. When reviewing Dai Smith's *Wales! Wales!* in 1985, Raymond Williams noted the irony of the fact that while Wales was viewed by outsiders in "unusually singular terms", cultural debates regarding language, class and identity within the nation were often "harsh and bitter quarrels".

Among the more glaring howlers in Fred Inglis's earlier biography was his description of Williams's move "towards that little group of self-mocking Welsh historians led by Gwyn Williams and Dai Smith, and their sometimes comic, always serious politics in Plaid Cymru". Putting the inappropriate adjectives to one side, Dai Smith's historical work has in fact been dedicated to rejecting the teleological narratives and myths that, in his view, underpin the moribund nationalist politics of Plaid Cymru. Recently, he has categorically rejected the use of postcolonial models in Welsh historiography, and aligns himself with Eric Hobsbawm's dismissive views on 'ethno-linguistic nationalisms'. However, this challenging, confrontational voice – familiar to those who have read Smith's key works of history and cultural criticism – is largely absent from this text. This is a measure of Dai Smith's achievement, for the voice that stays in the mind having finished *A Warrior's Tale* is that of Raymond Williams himself.

The decision to silence that voice in 1961, thus omitting the final 27 productive years of Williams's life, will seem curious to many. Why

conclude a biography at the moment when the subject starts to become influential? But this is a juncture that Williams recognised himself, in his introduction to *The Long Revolution* (1961):

"With this book and Culture and Society, and with my novel Border Country which I believe to have, in its particular and quite different way, an essential relevance to the two general books, I have completed a body of work which I set myself to do ten years ago."

Dai Smith tells us that *The Long Revolution* took final form "over the autumn and winter of 1959", and argues that Williams's 'ten years' take us back beyond the 1950 essay on *Ideas of Culture*, to the 1949 opening exploration of his border upbringing in *Brynnllwyd*. This time line also makes the novel *Border Country* the final completed work discussed in Smith's biography, and the making of that remarkable novel brings the narrative to an apt conclusion. The importance of Williams's fictional writings – both as a way of organising personal experience, and of relating the self to broader social and cultural movements – is the key reiterated insight of *A Warrior's Tale*.

This largely fictional focus does occasionally result in less detailed and less convincing accounts of the more well-known critical writings. *Culture and Society* (1958) remains widely available, making the lengthy quotations from its conclusion seem unnecessary in this instance. Williams's views of that book's purpose and intent are largely allowed to speak for themselves and there's little engagement with the, by now, considerable secondary literature that questions the excessively functionalist, compensatory terms of the 'culture and society' dualism in Williams's career-making study.

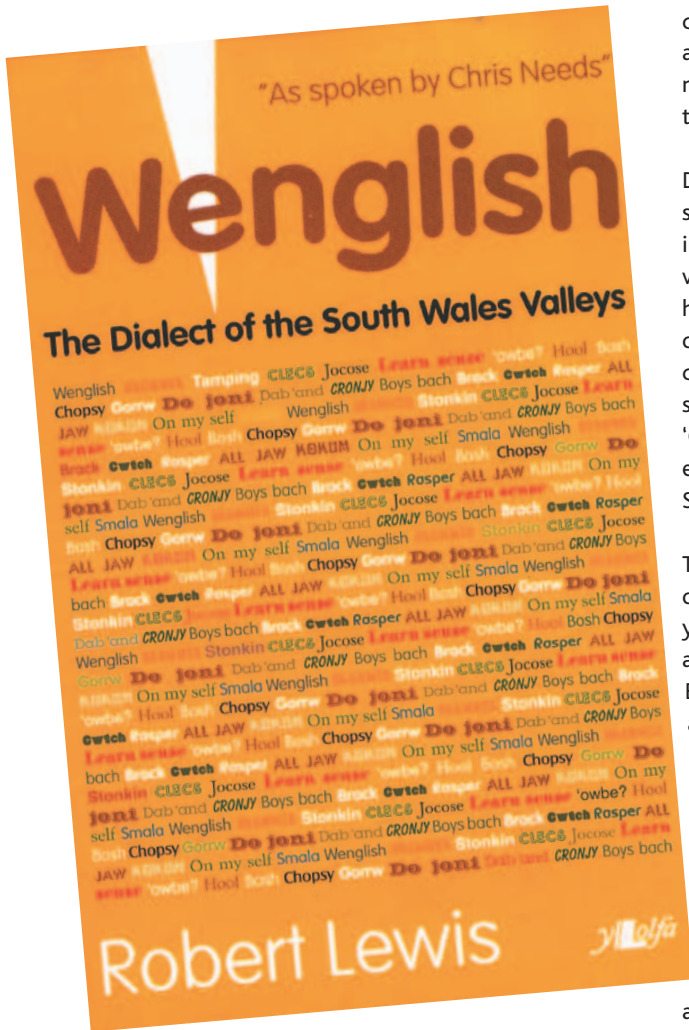
But it is understandable, and part of this biography's revisionist thrust, that Smith should see the "unifying again of the overlapping fluidity of a life and mind" as being manifested primarily in the novels, both published and unpublished. Williams noted that "while we may ...separate out particular aspects of life and treat them as if they were self-contained it is obvious that this is only how they may be studied not how they were experienced".

A Warrior's Tale is a major contribution to our understanding of both the life and the mind of Raymond Williams. Through his attentive and sensitive use of the family's papers, his understanding of the social and cultural world of the growing boy, and his essential, but not uncritical, humility in the face of the grown man's actual achievements, Dai Smith has deftly managed to reconnect the separated 'particular aspects' of Raymond Williams's life. This biography's subject would have appreciated its author's achievement in moving beyond the particulars, to communicate a sense of how the first half of that life was experienced.

Daniel Williams is Senior Lecturer in English and Assistant Director of the Centre for Research into the English Literature and Language of Wales at Swansea University. He is editor of Raymond Williams, Who Speaks for Wales? (2003). Dai Smith's Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale is published by Parthian Books. An earlier, shorter version of this article first appeared on the www.openDemocracy.net website in June 2008.

wenglish

robert lewis unpicks the dialect of the south Wales Valleys



Wenglish is the name adopted by John Edwards in the 1980s, when he first published his now famous *Talk Tidy* books, to denote the distinctive dialect form of English spoken in the south Wales Valleys. It developed in the Valleys 'melting pot' during the nineteenth century, as workers flocked into the area from other parts of Wales, other parts of the British Isles, and indeed further afield.

Wenglish is a fusion of the intonation of south Wales Welsh, Gwenhwyseg, with the forms of English spoken by the incoming workers. There is some influence, too, from Standard English. It has borrowed many words and expressions directly from the Welsh language, together with some grammatical structures and aspects of syntax. It is spoken by well over a million people, about double the number of Welsh speakers in Wales. For this reason alone, it deserves far greater attention than it has received up to now. In fact, until fairly recently, the predominant attitude towards Wenglish has been negative and dismissive.

Dialect and non-standard forms of English are generally stigmatised and thought of as in some way deficient and inferior. While standard English is undoubtedly an excellent vehicle for international communication, it does not score highly at regional and local level in terms of building community identity, in generating community solidarity, or developing a sense of belonging. For example, in Wenglish, the simple, honest directness of 'Shwmae butt', and the warmth of 'Come by 'ere and 'ave a cwtch with youer mam', with all their emotional connotations, are impossible to match precisely in Standard English.

The idea of writing an accessible practical guide to Wenglish came to me when I was tidying up my Swiss German about four years ago, with the help of the book 'Schyzertütsch' and accompanying CD by Swiss linguist Arthur Baur. In the book, Baur presents Swiss German to a Standard German-speaking audience, as a language in its own right, as though it was a course book for one of the more commonly taught languages such as French or Spanish. Dialect is accorded high status in German-speaking Switzerland where it is used without any stigma in every aspect of everyday life. Indeed, it forms part of the Swiss national identity and is a key differentiator between Switzerland and neighbouring Germany.

My book *Wenglish – The Dialect of the South Wales Valleys* is aimed at the general reader and its purpose is to stimulate a keener interest in and a better appreciation of Wenglish, both as a living speech form and as a badge of community identity. It is not intended as an academic paper on sociolinguistics or dialectology as such, though it does take a step or two in that direction. The issues raised in the book certainly merit further attention in the relevant departments of our schools, colleges and universities.

The core area of Wenglish corresponds neatly with the south Wales Valleys area, largely defined by the coalfield, extending from the Gwendraeth Valleys in the west to the Gwent valleys in the east. I have found it useful to divide this territory into three broad geographical areas – western, central and eastern. These distinctions are of course arbitrary but are useful to describe some of the variations in Wenglish, characterised by the speech of these three areas. The influence of Welsh is of course at its strongest in the far western part of the core area, from the Gwendraeth Valleys to the Swansea Valley.



Chris Needs can be heard every weekday on BBC Radio Wales from 10pm

as it was obviously regarded as more fashionable to speak in 'modern' and 'progressive' English, rather than in 'backward' and 'old-fashioned' Welsh.

I have termed the period 1945-80 as the 'Postclassical' period of Wenglish. It was during this time that Wenglish was submitted to massive influence from both Standard and American English.

Since 1980, the 'Modern' period has been one of radical structural change in the south Wales Valleys' industrial and employment base. The traditional industries, particularly coal but also steel, which to a great extent shaped the Valleys communities, experienced massive contraction. Although some new industries have come in to take their place, the net effects have been an increase in unemployment, out-migration of many of the younger, better educated, economically active people, even if only as far as Cardiff. Although there is now evidence of improvement, through the 1980s and 1990s there was a significant reduction in the general level of prosperity and in the range of facilities available locally in Valleys communities.

Linguistic tendencies in Modern Wenglish include the loss of older loan words, some diphthongisation of once pure vowels, glottalling (especially among younger speakers), and the more frequent use of extended verbal contractions.

More recently there has been a growing confidence in Welsh identity. The creation of the National Assembly, the 'Cool Cymru' phenomenon, as well as sporting and cultural successes, have all played their part in this process. There has also been a marked resurgence in interest in regional languages and dialects across Europe. Languages and cultures previously suppressed are once again finding their voice.

The book contains a brief account of the historical development of Wenglish in the context of wider industrial and social developments in south Wales. Its initial period corresponds to the early phases of industrial development in south Wales, from the late eighteenth century up to about 1840. The iron industry was a major catalyst for economic and linguistic development in this period. A period of further development and consolidation in both industrial and linguistic terms began around 1840 with the rapid development of the railways, both in Britain and America. Coal mining plays a key role in development during this period.

I have termed the period from 1900 to the end of the Second World War as the 'Classical' period of Wenglish, with the 1918-1939 inter-war years as the 'Golden Age', before the influence of Standard English increased considerably. It was in the early part of this 'Classical' period that English replaced Welsh as the dominant language in the Valleys, though this had of course happened earlier in some places. The adoption of English clearly had economic and social reasons behind it. English was regarded as the language of progress, knowledge of which was necessary if one wanted 'to get on'. At this time speaking English must also have carried some social prestige,

I hope my book will stimulate greater interest and pride in Wenglish and the culture in which it has evolved. I hope too that the book will raise its status and, in so doing, play some part in restoring pride and confidence to Valleys communities.

Robert Lewis was born and raised in the Swansea Valley and grew up hearing western forms of Wenglish as well as Gwenhwyseg, the southeastern dialect of Welsh. He is Head of Research at Visit Wales, part of the Department for Heritage of the Welsh Assembly Government. Wenglish – The Dialect of the South Wales Valleys is published by Y Lolfa, price £9.95.

Radio Wales presenter Chris Needs, quintessential Wenglish speaker.

straight line thinking

euros lewis provides a Welsh perspective on commonly used English terms

Community is one of the English language's most commonly used words. Examples abound: 'community health', 'community policing', 'community education' and 'community arts' not to mention the infamous 'community charge' and 'care in the community'. But what does 'community' mean? To whom or to what does the English word refer? I have more than a suspicion that it doesn't actually refer to any group

or anywhere in particular, perhaps other than somewhere that is peripheral to the centre. However, for inhabitants of Welsh-speaking communities, as well as communities that retain a Welsh identity even if they are no longer Welsh-speaking, 'community' (not to be confused with 'village') has no such nebulosity of meaning.

In Welsh 'cymuned' is the most commonly used translation of 'community'. However, where English relies on this one word, Welsh speakers have a wealth of vocabulary to draw from. If 'cymuned' is in peril of being debased by its association with 'community', words such as 'cymdogaeth', 'cymdeithas', 'bro' and 'milltir sgwâr' ensure that Welsh speakers know exactly what they're referring to when they use any of these words to denote community. For each and every one of them have people as their principal, inherent element. Indeed, it is impossible to say the word 'cymdogaeth' without thinking of people living and working together.

This plurality of words but specificity of connotation I believe to be culturally, and therefore politically, significant. For it declares that while government spokespeople and captains of industry apportion the word 'community' with jargonised expediency, Welsh speakers, and those within the Welsh experience, use it with cultural precision.

This is because 'bro' or 'cymdogaeth' are not a geographic division or even a demographic notion. Rather, they express a dynamic of living based on a complex dynamic of relationships. Some are of blood. Others, but not necessarily most, are of long association. All denote collaborative effort and creativity.

The word-fashion of the moment encourages us to describe any group of people who are in any sort of contact with each other as a community. For example, artists are commonly referred to as being members of the 'arts community'; on-line surfers are members of the 'web community'. Cultural deviousness is at work here, subliminally replacing the shared effort and all-or-nothing engagement of community with the individuality and freedom-of-choice of a network. Under such subtle pressure, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that deep at the heart of words such as 'cymdeithas' and 'cymuned' is co-responsibility, the core ingredient of Welsh community.

If Welsh has a plurality of words for the single English 'community', the two languages seem more in agreement with

It makes a difference what language you speak... an iconic image from the 1970's – a protest march in Cardiff against the gaoling of Cymdeithas yr Iaith leader Dafydd Iwan.



the word 'culture' ('diwylliant'). But such numeric equity should not be allowed to deceive us. For, while English speakers idiomatically link culture with the arts ('arts and culture'), Welsh speakers have no corresponding idiom. Rather, culture in Welsh is yoked with language ('iaith a diwylliant').

Once again, this difference has deep significance; a significance that is more than a difference of emphasis. On the one hand, in its common 21st century English usage, 'culture' is a commodity: to be found, generally speaking, at the higher end of the arts market-place. On the other hand, 'culture' as 'diwylliant' is rarely to be seen in this specific sense. Rather, it is omnipresent. For this is the tension of energy that circulates around, into and out of the powerhouse of community; largely invisible, but all-pervasive.

The differences surrounding the words 'community' and 'culture' are clear reminders of the fact that language is a product of culture, and that culture, in its Welsh sense is inextricably linked to the dynamic of community. When one considers that the self-defined 'Cymru' is a conflation of 'cym' (together) and 'bro' (community), not only is the language reminding us of the commonality of community within the Welsh experience, it is also telling us that community is central to our experience.

And central to this concept of non-peripherality is the dynamic of the circle. For that is what live, meaningful communities are: circles of belonging and of energy; circles within circles; circles overlapping circles; intertwining; inter-weaving; ever-changing; heterogeneous; non-conformist; fidgety; visceral; that is to say complex.

However, if we look at the hegemony of power and wealth at work in Wales in particular, and the United Kingdom in general (be it in its democratic or capitalist form, benign or rabid of temperament), we see a different geometry in action: the geometry of the straight line. This dynamic is strict; ruled by measure; measured by rules; begins, middles and ends; in three months; in three years; fixed; homogeneous; uniform; without complication. Based mainly on a parallel or juxtaposition of time and money, straight-line thinking demands that outcomes are recognised before work is even begun.

Such uncreative restriction of action is diametrically opposed to the circulatory free-flow of community whose evolvment – driven by the tensions and energy of collaborative effort and questioning – not only allow for constant directional readjustments but also encourage the expansion of creative possibilities and the extension of collective ambition.

Whilst the word 'trust' sits close to 'relationship', 'collaboration' and 'co-responsibility' at the heart of the circle of community, it does not find room in the lexicon of the straight-line. Correspondingly, most of the key words underscoring straight line action ('regeneration', 'outcomes', 'clients', 'marketing', 'outreach', 'them' to name but a few) are not to be found within the circle of community. And for good reason. For example: the Welsh term for regeneration ('adfywio' – 'bringing to life again') carries the unfortunate message that a community destined for resuscitation must be dead, which is not the best starting place

for a programme of confidence and capacity building! And it can be no coincidence that there is no popularly accepted Welsh translation for the term 'outreach' – a practice that is based on the (foreign) premise of centre and periphery.

Such differences of vocabulary would not be important were it not for the fact that it is on the basis of such words that the syntax of straight-line action is planned and imposed upon our communities, be it with the best of intentions or with knowing irony. Consequently, despite strict adherence to a politically prescribed bilingualism, the language of community development is destined to be as inappropriate as the predisposed questions forming the basis of any straight-line exercise, whose basic script is invariably, "How are you going to spend the money? What do you need? What are you lacking?" In contrast, embedded, or culturally sensitive practice instinctively asks: What is our potential? How can we develop upon our strengths? And, some way down the list: What help do we need from others?

The wrong questions derive of course from a presumption that irrespective of where we live, of what language or community environment that surrounds us, deep down what we need, what we aspire to, what we see as important are the same. This is multiculturalism as defined by Blair, Brown and Straw – the British-ness of common, normative values, based on a contributionist dynamic where the role of the non-conformist, the minority or the perceived marginal is to contribute to, and so, ultimately, assimilate with, the centre.

Thus, it is to be seen that the problem of us (Welsh-speaking, Welsh-defining communities) and them (the collusion of state management and multinational power) is a matter greater than the complex contest of human relationships and *laissez-faire* economics. It is part of a larger tension than between the rural and urban, and a bigger fight than bottom-up versus top-down. It is no less than a clash of cultures: the same clash of cultures that has seen government ministers dictate as to what is acceptable dress, and what is not; encourage the development of faith schools, but insist on a curriculum of 'core-value' British-ness; and to make the word 'radical' synonymous with the word 'terrorist'.

On the other hand, the battle to sustain and develop Welsh communities – those complex interwoven places of individual aspirations and shared concern; of permanently fluctuating tension and visceral consensus – is inextricably linked with the discourse of another multiculturalism. Here the dominant culture steps down from its imperialist plinth and enters into a creative discourse that celebrates difference as a means towards developing communities that are truly plural, genuinely inclusive, impressively confident, and powerfully dynamic.

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I was there

**peter stead
reflects on the
welsh performance
culture**

Yes, I was at Wembley to see Cardiff City in both April and May 2008 and I have the photos to prove it. For some years now I have had to disabuse people of the idea that I had been there in 1927. In a history tutorial that was going nowhere one of my students once asked me to identify what had been the highlight of my career as a City fan. I thought long and hard and then suggested it had been when my father had taken me to Wembley in 1927. There was not a flicker on the faces of any of the students in my office and they all sat there awaiting further details. If they thought me that old I had clearly lost my charisma. I took immediate early retirement from university teaching.

In fact as a child I had every excuse for believing that I had been there, as my

father (who had also not been there) talked of little else. In the heady days of spring 2008 the City manager Dave Jones talked a good deal of exorcising the burdensome legend of 1927. I, for one, never felt that need. I was delighted to enter the new Wembley to see my own team, but I felt a little as if I was trespassing on my dreams. There was a slight air of unreality. At the semi-final (much the better of the two days) I was thrilled to discover that I was sitting next to City's most distinguished fan, the author Dannie Abse, who proceeded to provide an expertly detailed analysis of every Barnsley weakness.

At the joyous moment of triumph, just as the City players were realising that they had earned the right to perform a

Peter Stead photographed with Cardiff City fans at the Wembley cup final.



synchronised running dive on the already sacred turf, I looked down to see a burly cop forcibly preventing Lord Kinnock from joining the players in their celebrations. It was almost a flashback to the Grunwick dispute of an earlier decade. Turning around to see how the VIPs were doing, I could see the First Minister flexing at least his elbows to the raucous disco music that now blared out across the stadium. If we were at the point of entering the history books, the whole village that is Wales seemed to be up for it.

The final was something of an anti-climax although there was a general feeling that City might have won. Certainly they would have won if Dannie Abse and I had been managing the side. We would have better harnessed and organised the three

talented Welsh players who constituted the core of last season's team. Now it is the Arsenal fans who will discover Aaron Ramsey is a superbly gifted young man, perhaps the most naturally gifted creative player Wales has produced since Ivor Allchurch.

Of course, the great Ivor's statue stands proudly outside the Liberty Stadium and, in common with a number of regular fans, I have taken to rubbing his left boot before every match. Already this act of piety has secured promotion for the Swans (or 'Los Cisnes' as they are now dubbed) and helped ease my rheumatism.

And, yes, I do support the two south Wales teams, Cardiff since 1952 and the Swans since 1957. I have always felt a little sorry for monogamous fans.

Certainly I have twice the agony but also, as was the case last season, I have twice the fun and there is a home game every Saturday. It was this awareness that I am usually to be found enthusing about any good Welsh cause that prompted that accomplished phone-in host, the BBC's Richard Evans, to invite me to be a guest on his show on the April 21st. I was there ostensibly to pay tribute to Joe Calzaghe who had just won his fight in Las Vegas. But what Richard asked me was to name which achievement had given me greatest pleasure, the Swans going up, the City going to Wembley, Calzaghe's triumph or the BAFTAs heaped on *Gavin and Stacey*.

Of course I had to pick Calzaghe, for his was an individual achievement. Just how often does a Welshman win a major bout in America? But it was a close call, for Richard could not have known that my appreciation of those brilliant *Gavin and Stacey* scripts had been heightened by the fact that I had grown up on that very Barry hill where the delightful Stacey lives. She is from 47 Trinity Street; I lived in number 90.

It certainly was a heady spring and there was even talk (guess where?) of a Welsh 'sporting golden era'. I preferred to think in terms of further evidence of the extent to which we are committed to a 'performance culture'. We once lived in a dynamic industrial society and out of that there had developed a vibrant popular culture. Our commercial wealth has gone but our cultural energies persist and the time has come to accept the extent to which those energies define our nation. One prominent Welsh banker, who has for years urged the Welsh to become more entrepreneurial, recently argued that it is precisely in the arts that we display both our enterprise and excellence.

Shane Williams, Bryn Terfel, Aaron Ramsey, Tom Jones and Anthony Hopkins are exceptionally talented stars but on the international stage they are performers who carry the added responsibility of being national icons. We all feel more fully Welsh because of their excellence. It was ever thus in Wales and, indeed, at the local level in every Welsh community. The old denominations

always referred to their leading preachers as 'stars'. In every Welsh village there was a star preacher, a star teacher, a star outside half, a star inside forward, a star boxer, a star tenor and a star female soloist of a certain age who rattled the chapel windows in her biannual moments of glory. Those stars, then as now, made us feel good and part of a community but also assured us that our community was doing its job. We should today more openly acknowledge what we once knew – excellence in performance is the best reason for there being a Wales at all.

Earlier in the year all the talk was of Terfel's Falstaff, Ledley's goal, Shane's tries and Joanna Page's charm. But everywhere one looked young Welsh people were excelling. At Kilburn's Tricycle Theatre I saw a production of *Under Milk Wood* and very much agreed with Lloyd Evans's *Spectator* review in which he commented that a return to the play "is like a visit to a childhood holiday beach, full of dependable surprises and half-remembered pleasures". After the show I chatted to Howell Evans whose brilliant Captain Cat had poignantly made abundantly clear why Dylan had preferred Polly Garter to all the other women of the village. Howell is 80 and talked of his early days in Maesteg ("Canaan three times every Sunday").

Alongside him in the bar was the 20-year old student, Cerith Flinn, from Llanelli, who had been making his debut playing amongst other roles No Good Boyo. Cerith had been as good as Howell, but perhaps the main Flinn contribution to the success of the evening had been the seven members of his family who had taken up their seats at the front of the stalls and proceeded to roar at every joke and quip throughout the evening (especially the references to Billy Swansea). Philip Madoc later confirmed that they had provided by far the most appreciative audience of the whole run.

In London there were great Welsh performances wherever one looked. I saw Des Barrit in *The History Boys* and reflected on all the brilliantly imaginative teaching that had gone on in Welsh schools. At the Donmar in Peter Gill's *Small Change* two young Welsh actors, Luke Evans and Matt

Ryan, deployed contrasting styles to create the poetry, guilt and anguish of working class childhoods in the Cardiff of the 1950s. At the Globe the director Dominic Dromgoole had been determined to make his production of *King Lear* one that would appeal to the standing groundlings and to do that he had cast two young handsome Welsh actors as the sons of Gloucester. Swansea's Daniel Hawksford strutted the stage as Edmond whilst Llanelli's Trystan Gravelle almost became a circus performer in his demanding Poor Tom scenes. The Welsh accents allowed every word to be heard and that is not always the case at the Globe. Later in New York I managed to see Daniel Evans' acclaimed performance in the Sondheim musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, one in which his singing, energy and brightness demanded the attention of the whole audience in the huge theatre.

I was back in Swansea for the Welsh premiere of the movie *The Edge Of Love*. I congratulated Mathew Rhys on his depiction of Dylan Thomas (a performance that greatly pleased Dylan's daughter Aeronwy) but the actor went on to explain that he was now returning to California for the rest of the year. Meanwhile Michael Sheen, having played David Frost on stage and screen, has come home to play Brian Clough. There are so many stars in our firmament and quite rightly they have to go where the work is. It is good that the world as a whole is discovering their talents. Meanwhile, in Wales we need to ask whether we have begun to understand the significance of the talent we have created.

My reflections on the success stories of 2008 merely reflect my own interests. Elsewhere in West End musicals, rock concerts and festivals, recording studios and in television shows of one sort or another young Welsh performers exude both charisma and confidence and generate their own fan clubs. Our young people long to perform and welcome the subsequent publicity. Talent and charm tends to find its own level. However, as a society we need to ask whether we are harnessing our young talent in the ways that will best fulfil our own cultural and commercial needs.

Do we, for example, see enough of our young actors? It would be good to see

Mathew Rhys and Michael Sheen on the stage in Cardiff whether it be in a Peter Gill play or, even better, in a new play by a young Welsh writer. We could do with premieres of more Welsh films for it is inconceivable that our present crop of outstanding actors could not teach us far more about ourselves than we currently know. In all the arts and sports we are currently underselling ourselves in both cultural and commercial terms. Our broadcasters, theatres, and musicians are all lacking in cultural ambition and all our cultural providers are lacking in imagination in terms of presentation.

The fact that the business of Wales is Show Business should by now have seized the imagination of every politician, educationalist, producer and, most crucially, every entrepreneur in the country. I think it was Gwyn Thomas who said that in the Rhondda of his youth "every day was a jamboree". I now find that Grand Slams and Cup Finals have given me an appetite for jamborees, the big occasion and, above all, for success. I think my Wales is capable of bringing home the Heineken Cup, of Premiership football, of a national theatre, of producing network television shows, of staging rock concerts and a major international festival of the arts along the lines of Edinburgh. Furthermore, we could easily use colleges and schools to provide theatres, cinemas and sports facilities to serve the whole of their local communities. The fullest self-expression of every young person should henceforth be the abiding concern of every Welsh politician.

Yes we should read our history books and polish up our heritage but we should absorb what the first months of 2008 taught us. Shane Williams, Aaron Ramsey, Joe Calzaghe and Michael Sheen have ushered us into a new era. The world is there waiting to be enthralled and entertained by a people who know how to do it. As I watched Aaron Ramsey almost save the Bluebirds at Wembley I gave thanks for a culture that had made me value sporting genius. I also knew that, while I was not watching history being made (we lost 1-0), I was witnessing something more important. My country was being redefined.