

# Youth Assembly Wales



Theo Davies-Lewis

*Theo Davies-Lewis is a 17-year old student at St Michaels school in Llanelli, passionate about enhancing the Youth Democratic System in Wales, for the benefit of future generations.*

**A Youth Assembly for Wales** – In this paper Theo Davies-Lewis argues that our nation seriously needs to consider the consequences of the failure to have a national Welsh Youth Assembly has on both youth engagement in politics in Wales and the nation's youth standing in the rest of the United Kingdom.

## **The background – What can be done?**

Wales is being left behind in its youth engagement. It is the only country in the UK, and one of the only ones in the EU without a national Youth Democratic System. This is because the Welsh Assembly cut the funding for Welsh Member of the UK Youth Parliament – leaving Wales' youth segregated politically. The Funky Dragon programme was brilliant, but I am proposing a bold new plan to make sure we are in the democratic process in the UK. The concept of a new Youth Assembly is my idea. The idea has so far attracted interest from many, including the First Minister of Wales. Many organisations, think-tanks and public figures have voiced their support for the crucial idea. Such an Assembly could help prevent the widespread youth dissatisfaction with politics we are now experiencing. Such an Assembly could help prevent the widespread youth dissatisfaction with politics we are now experiencing.

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Assembly as a representative  
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The Youth Assembly would function across all 60 constituencies across Wales and would be democratically elected by the young people in those areas - like the Assembly elections. The Youth Assembly will be a body that links with the Welsh Assembly as a representative of young people in Wales. There will be annual debates in the Assembly Chamber on what campaigns to focus on – 5 titles of campaigns are voted on by the youth of Wales and the Youth Assembly then narrow them down to 2 in the Chamber debate. These ballots and elections can be done so through a ballot but also electronically, with the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) recording over 35,000 votes online for the elections. The non-political party body will encourage positive social change for the benefit of all and work with youth groups across Wales to allow the youth of Wales to be heard. Manifestos are released each year on the work of Youth Assembly Members (YAMs). The YAMs are not paid, but voluntary workers, hoping to make a real difference to the livelihoods of young people in their local communities through this political body.

## **So why do we need a Youth Assembly?**

Here are a few of the many reasons we need a Youth Assembly:

Inspiring thousands into Politics for the future:

The 2014 Scottish referendum galvanised young people's interest in politics, Wales' young people want a voice in matters that concern our future. A Youth Assembly would inspire young people to engage in Politics and to shape Wales' future, today. The 60 Youth AMs (to mirror the structure of the Welsh Assembly),

**Wales' young people want a voice in matters that concern our future**

democratically elected, work for their young people in their constituencies and work with local youth councils and other youth groups to bring social change to the modernising country we love and are so passionate about. It's not just about those 60 YAMs; it's about the thousands of young people across Wales having the power and the engagement in the system. The

Youth Assembly will shape the next political and social leaders for our nation to compete and succeed internationally.

Educating Young People on the Democratic Process and its Importance:

The Youth Assembly will make sure that young people understand what powers the Assembly have and their functions. At the current rate of devolution, we must educate our young people on how our world and our different societies work. The fact that it mirrors the Assembly is important, due to the current rate of devolution – educating people on our political system will be vital for the next wave of leaders. The Youth Assembly offers a big stepping-stone for our youngsters to become active in learning the importance of our Assembly and the need for Wales to be more ambitious in the future.

Giving a voice to Young People:

At the moment, Wales has no voice in national youth politics. The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) has members from England, Scotland and NI - but none in Wales. The Youth Assembly will give power to the everyday young man or woman to vote for what campaigns should be at the heartbeat of the Youth Assembly. This has been proved effective in the UKYP – where the Westminster Government, for instance, announced plans to put sex and relationships education as a statutory part of the curriculum as a direct result of UK Youth Parliament campaign in 2008. The Youth Assembly can have this affect on the Welsh Assembly and make sure that Carwyn Jones and his fellow AMs know what the young people of Wales wan politically and socially. With no voice, Wales and its young people will be left pondering how relevant their voices are to the conversations people are having on politics and democracy.

### **Summary:**

We can make this change for several reasons. Wales is a passionate nation which is proud of its past. However, we must now make sure we can be prepared for our future. The Youth Assembly has the power of inspiring a generation. Without it, we stay on the same old road of the neglect of Youth in Wales. Carwyn Jones has rejected the idea - believing the current youth engagement processes work, when they don't.

He adds: "I'm not sure that a Youth Assembly model with 60 YAMs would do this. If we truly want to engage with thousands of children and young people we need to consider innovative and accessible models that inform and engage through a variety of methods and offer a choice."

With the Youth Assembly, we have the power of positive and meaningful change that puts hope in the eyes of the next generation of young Welshmen and women which will drive our country to success in the future. It's not about Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem or Plaid – it's about Wales' young people and our future.

*If you wish to make a comment on this short article then you can email [info@gorwel.co](mailto:info@gorwel.co)*