

GORWEL

The future of Wales doesn't belong to the faint hearted, it belongs to the brave.

This Discussion Paper is designed to act as a catalyst for a broad discussion on Wales' future. It represents the views and opinions of its authors and not of Gorwel.

We would like to thank all those who have contributed to this Discussion Paper and hope that this is part of the start of the regeneration of our nation and the communities we all live in.

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Gorwel is an independent, Welsh, non-party political, think tank. Gorwel publishes papers and research that can help stimulate topical debate on a variety of issues central to the future prosperity and good governance of Wales.

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Wales is not an economic basket case or lost cause. Yes, there is significant scope for improvement, but with sensible policies and careful stewardship, there is little reason why we cannot grow our economy from its current base.

Interminable discussions about the Barnett Formula obscure the reality that, per capita, we receive more money from Westminster than a number of English regions. Our desire to compare ourselves to Scotland blinds us into believing that an increase in our funding is a game changer, when it's not. An additional £300 million or so on top of a block grant of around £15 billion is not going to catapult our economy in any way.

We have so much in our favour as a country. There is still a feeling of shared heritage and togetherness amongst many people, and our small population ensures that it is relatively easy to connect with the decision makers. People speak of "Team Wales" and whilst much can be done to move away from the leeks, daffodils, rugby and beer stereotype, we do have something special that gives us a platform on which to build a successful nation.

For such a small nation Wales has some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. It is an amazing place to live; a green and pleasant land that provides a quality of environment and natural resources that too many of us take for granted. People travel from around the world to visit Wales and we need to appreciate and capitalize on our surroundings.

The Welsh business community is beginning to regain its confidence and companies such as Admiral, Toyota and Airbus are valuable assets not only in the wealth they generate, but also in the aspiration and best-practice they encourage. Yes, there is more we can do to encourage indigenous Welsh business, but slowly Wales is re-inventing itself – away from its heavy industrial past – and developing businesses that can survive in today's competitive global markets.

Time for a *realistic perspective*

What is *holding us back* as a nation?

02A: Our self-limiting attitude?

One of the more surprising elements of modern Welsh life is the desire among some to abrogate responsibility and blame external factors for issues within Wales. Whether it is the Welsh economy, Welsh public services, our relationship with the English, or ever more parochial concerns, the "victim" narrative creates an environment where Wales gives the appearance of wanting to limit itself to small dreams. Wales has seemingly become obsessed with Wales in the context of Wales.

02B: Our failure to embrace wealth creation?

The respected journalist Simon Jenkins, in a Guardian article last year, wrote of Wales' need to break from "the politics of grievance and subsidy". One entrepreneur to whom we spoke said "profit and competition are the dirtiest words in Wales". Unless Wales can detach itself from these attitudes it will be increasingly difficult to build a prosperous economy with effective public services. If we do not embrace wealth creation how are we going to fund Wales in the coming decades?

02C: Our lack of accountability?

When the Assembly first came into being there was much talk about accountability and government transparency: it would be wonderful if Welsh politicians and civil servants were to fully embrace this in practice. Successful democracies need the comfort of a vibrant press to hold politicians to account, and this is especially important in a small nation such as Wales with young political institutions. We have many excellent journalists within Wales, but there are concerns that politicians or civil servants could express their displeasure at unfavourable coverage by limiting "offending" journalists' access to stories and choosing to spend advertising budgets elsewhere. It would be disastrous if the media became a mouthpiece for Wales' political establishment and real care needs to be taken in regard to this. If we are to see a vibrant Wales, we must ensure that all levels of government within Wales act transparently and are held publicly accountable.

02D: Our lack of Civil Society?

Our once proud history of independent thinking, discussion and debate has been ebbing away and we need to ensure that civil society in Wales is cherished, supported and encouraged. Moreover, a strong civil society would promote greater government accountability. The often stifling political consensus and culture of conformity mean many ideas and innovations never see the light of day. People who will happily express their concerns and ideas in private rarely voice them to a larger audience and this reticence serves Wales poorly.

02E: Our lack of mentors?

Support and the presence of family, immediate and extended, played a huge part in Wales' success in the past. Family provided encouragement, nurture and practical assistance. Family played instrumental roles in guiding and caring for people, particularly the young and the elderly. Times have changed, as has family structure: the roles once played by family, schools and faith-based institutions have been supplanted by solutions from the state that have been less than successful. If we are serious about transforming Wales, we need to look at strengthening families and communities and, through doing so, encouraging mentors and role models.

The State:

the solution or the problem?

For Wales to become a great nation we are going to have to look at new, innovative ways of doing things, particularly in the area of public services, whether they be delivered by local or national government. Far too often Wales has embraced a "not invented here" approach and the negative consequences are plain for us all to see. We need to realize that a nation that embraces sound practice from elsewhere in the world is courageous and confident, not weak.

Both education and the NHS in Wales have serious issues, but these can be solved if we have the will to do so. If we do not embrace the realities of the situation and bring about fundamental change then we really will have intractable problems. Other countries have coped with similar issues and we need to look to them for possible solutions, even if those solutions fail to comfortably fit within existing party political policy. Many of our politicians really care about Wales and we need to give them permission to get on with their jobs. Currently too many of our best politicians and civil servants are constrained by the demands of compliance to a particular party political viewpoint. We also need to give them permission to adapt to or try new approaches, and risk making mistakes. We need to look at what works for the people of Wales rather than just what is convenient for Welsh politicians and Welsh civil servants.

We are *too great a nation* to limit ourselves to small dreams

Time after time, rhetoric from within Wales portrays Wales as some sort of basket case. We have so much going for us and it is imperative we act boldly and courageously. If we are serious in wanting a revitalized, exciting and dynamic Wales it is us, the citizens of Wales, that will need to contribute to the future and make the difference. For too long we have looked to the state to provide answers and change the nation, but that has not got us very far. Each citizen can and should make a difference. This is not so much the Wales we want, as the Wales I will help create.

The issues we talk about are too important to be left to the politicians and the machinery of government, without input from those within Wales who are outside the political discourse but have much to offer.

We need a fresh approach, a new start. The current re-evaluation of our political structures and relationships as part of the devolution process gives us the ideal opportunity to look to build a Wales we can all be proud of. We are fortunate in that both the Secretary of State for Wales and the First Minister of Wales are passionate believers in a prosperous and vibrant Wales.

We need our politicians to provide leadership and with the strength to make decisions that are right for Wales and the people of Wales, even though they may not be universally popular within their own political party.

We therefore invite the Secretary of State and the First Minister to have the courage to work closely together, across the political divide, to ensure that Wales has the leadership and the consistent direction it deserves.

To succeed in creating a successful and prosperous Wales that is globally competitive and has effective and efficient public services we need fresh ideas and new approaches rather than well-meaning political rhetoric and policies that have not worked.

We believe Wales would greatly benefit if the First Minister and Secretary of State engaged with those in Wales outside the political sphere by creating a forum to discuss the issues facing Wales and working towards solutions without the constraints of vested political interest.

It would be suggested that they jointly convene an annual "Council of Saint David" whereby experienced and successful individuals from all aspects of life within Wales, but who fall outside the party political arena, have the opportunity to contribute to the future of Wales*.

With politicians working together, strong leadership, consistent direction, and the input of those outside the political parties, there is every hope that Wales can become a prosperous, confident and dynamic nation.

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*To succeed the Council of Saint David needs to be focused with medium and long-term goals, together with authoritative measures that monitor progress towards such goals. Proper governance will be imperative and should be ensured through an independent Board - free of politicians or those closely connected to the political parties - that publishes full minutes of its discussions.