Democratic Reform

Representation

Westminster

Following the creation of the Scottish Parliament, the number of Scottish MPs was reduced from 72 to 59. The same did not happen upon Wales receiving legislative powers (including over health and education) and as such Wales remains, proportionally, the best represented nation at Westminster. A review of Parliamentary seats by The Boundary Commission, in their last review in 2011, recommended a reduction in Welsh seats from 40 to 30.

Figure 1 – Representation at Westminster

Country	No of MPs	Population*	Ratio
UK	650	63.7million	1:98,000
England	533	53.5million	1:100,375
Scotland	59	5.3million	1:89,831
Northern Ireland	18	1.8million	1:100,000
Wales	40	3.1million	1:77,500

*Population figures taken from National Office of Statistics mid 2012 estimates

1. **Should the number of Welsh MPs change?**

National Assembly for Wales

The National Assembly for Wales currently has 60 Members, including the First Minister and Cabinet. In terms of proportionality, Wales has the highest ratio of AMs to population of any of the devolved administrations:-

Figure 2 – Representation at Devolved Administrations

Country	AMs or MSPs	Population*	Ratio
Scotland (Scottish Parliament)	129	5.3 million	1:41,085
Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Assembly)	108	1.8 million	1:16,666
Wales (National Assembly for Wales)	60	3.1 million	1:51,666

*Population figures taken from National Office of Statistics mid 2012 estimates

As well as Wales having fewer Assembly Members, there is also a lower percentage available to scrutinise the work of the Welsh Government.

The *Size Matters* report[1] states that

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[1] Size Matters: Making the National Assembly more effective, UK's Changing Union and Electoral Reform Society Cymru

"Theoretically, 47 of the 60 AMs are available to undertake scrutiny after the deduction of the 13 Ministers and Deputy Ministers. However, the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer restrict themselves to the Business Committee, the Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee, and the Committee for Scrutiny of the First Minister. In addition, the Conservative and Plaid leaders and the Labour Chief Whip generally do not attend committees. So, in practice, the actual number of AMs available for scrutiny work is 42."

The following table, also taken from the Size Matters report compares the number of elected representatives with those available for scrutiny: -

Figure 3: Members of UK legislatures available to undertake scrutiny and legislative functions

	Total number of seats	Members Available	Percentage
UK Parliament	650	522	85%
Scottish Parliament	129	113	88%
Northern Ireland Assembly	108	92	85%
National Assembly for Wales	60	42	70%

Note: Table based on Remuneration Board of the National Assembly for Wales report, *Fit for Purpose*, para. 142, 2011. The comparative statistics were calculated by the National Assembly Members' Research Service using information provided on the websites of the Governments and Legislatures in question.[2]

The low proportion of Assembly Members has been criticised for preventing the appropriate level of scrutiny of the Welsh Government, as AMs are required to attend multiple committees and are therefore have less time to familiarize themselves with the information.

The main argument against increasing the number of AMs is the cost. The average cost per AM is £225000 per year (including pay, expenses, support staff and equipment).[3] The *Size Matters* report argues that there are hidden costs associated with not increasing the number of AMs, including "ineffective scrutiny, ineffective opposition, ineffective checks and balances, and a general lack of accountable government".[4]

In a study, Swedish economist Per Pettersson-Lidbom stated

"The estimated effect of adding one additional member to the council is to decrease total spending with 0.5 percent. The total effect on the budget is, however, much larger since the change in council size is usually between 6-10 members, and therefore the total effect is in the order of 3-5 percent."[5]

If Wales were to follow the recommendation of the Richards Commission and increase the number of AMs to 80, by Pettersson-Lidbom's calculations spending could be reduced by around 10%. The cost of the additional 20 members would be in the region of £4.5million but potential savings from Wales' £15billion budget could be in the region of 1.5 billion.

Alternative suggestions include employing experts to sit on Committees to provide scrutiny, or the introduction of a second chamber.

2. **How do we improve scrutiny of the Welsh Government?**

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid pg 17
[4] Size Matters: Making the National Assembly more effective, UK's Changing Union and Electoral Reform Society Cymru, pg 14
[5] Pettersson-Lidbom, Per, Does the Size of the Legislature Affect the Size of Government? Evidence from Two Natural Experiments, 21 October 2005

3. Should the number of Welsh Assembly Members be increased?
4. Should experts be employed to sit on committees to improve scrutiny?
5. Should Wales have a second Chamber?
6. Should constituents in Wales have the power to recall Assembly Members? On what grounds should it be possible to recall an Assembly Member?
7. Should we have single or multi-member constituencies?
8. Is this system of constituency and regional AMs the most sustainable?
9. Should we support Dual Candidacy?
10. What method of voting should be employed for Assembly elections?
11. How do you see the role of the Quango in Wales?

Local Government

Wales is considered to have too many councillors (see Figure 4). The Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery recommendation that the number of councils be reduced from 22 to between 10-12 could potentially still leave Wales with 900 councillors.

Currently, there is a cap of 75 councillors per council. However, the councils vary considerably in population and physical size. Other countries base the number of councillors on population size (Finland) or the number of eligible voters (Sweden).

Figure 4 – Representation at Local Government

Country	No of Councillors	Population*	Ratio
England	18116	53.5 million	1:2953
Scotland	1220	5.3 million	1:4344
Northern Ireland	582	1.8 million	1:3093
Wales	1254	3.1 million	1:1472

*Population figures taken from National Office of Statistics mid 2012 estimates

12. Should the number of representatives we have be controlled by a cap, or based on a minimum numbers?
13. Should the rurality of an area also be a factor in setting the number of elected representatives?
14. Are we content with the level at which services are delivered? Should more be devolved? Should some services be taken back to Cardiff?
15. Is a single template for powers realistic? Should we have a more flexible model which allows powers to be devolved if in the local interest but to remain at a higher level if preferred?

Community Representation and Empowerment

There are 735 community and town councils in Wales covering 70% of the population. They are served by approximately 8000 town and community councillors.[6] The Williams Commission notes that Community Councils vary significantly in size, 67% of elections are uncontested and 12% of seats were unfilled. As such only around 20% of community councillors are elected by the public.[7]

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[6] One Voice Wales, www.onevoicewales.org.uk/allabout-councils
[7] Full Report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery

The Williams Commission recommended the merger or enlargement of town and community councils, in order to overcome the issues arising because some councils are too small to deliver services. However, they do not believe that a two-tier system of government should be created.

There are many councils which take a very active role in providing services in their local area with great success. Other areas however, suffer due to lack of engagement.

1. **Are Community/Town Councils the best way to represent people locally?**
2. **How do we encourage people to take part in local democracy?**

Voting

Until 2001, Wales generally had the highest turnout at General Elections. Turnout throughout the UK has seen a decline since 1992, although the 2010 did see a slight rise in turnout.[8]

Among the devolved administrations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) Wales has consistently had the lowest turnout, and all three administrations have seen a decline since their introduction in 1998 (Northern Ireland) and 1999 (Scotland and Wales) (See Figure 5).

Turnout is highest in Wales at General Elections (2010 – 64.8%), followed by Assembly elections (2011 – 41.4%) and local elections (2012 – 38%). European Elections see a particularly low turnout at only 30.4% at the 2009 European Elections.

Several theories exist as to why voter turnout is low. They include:-

- Voter fatigue – too many elections
- Voter feeling their vote does not count
- Voter feeling that there is not enough difference between the parties so vote will not make a difference

The USA uses several different methods in order to encourage people to vote, including:-

- Same Day Registration
- Early voting (at a polling station)
- Absentee ballots (similar to our postal vote system)

Many countries conduct their elections on a weekend, with Sunday being particularly popular. However, expect where there is compulsory voting, voter turnout is no higher than that of the UK.
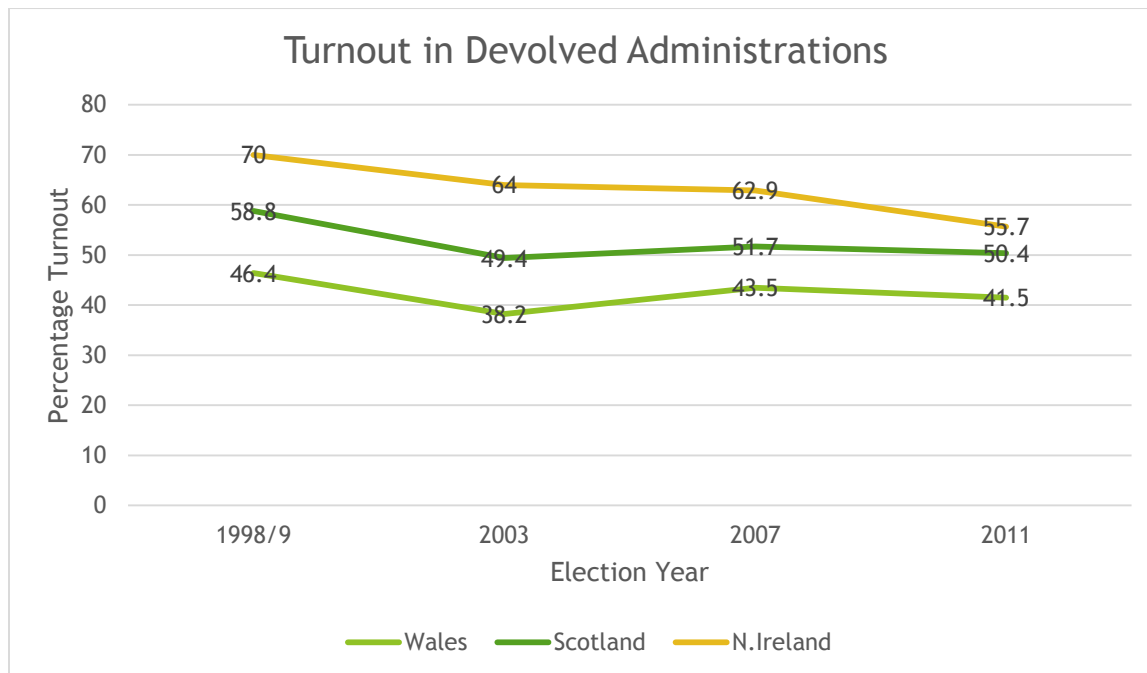
In the UK, you are only able to vote at your assigned polling station. Whilst in theory this should be your nearest polling station, this is not always the case as polling stations are not always central to their polling area, due to the availability of buildings in which the poll can be held.

Several countries have trialed the use of online voting systems. [insert more info]

One of the main reasons cited for falling turnout is that the voter does not wish to vote for any of the candidates on the ballot. Currently they may either spoil their ballot, stay home or vote for the person they dislike the least. Other countries have included options which allow people to decline to vote (certain Canadian states) or choose "none of the above" (previously available in Russia). The main concern with a none of the above option is that it would trigger another election if it were successful, increasing costs.

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[8] Elections: Turnout, House of Commons Library, 3 July 2013

Figure 5

Turnout in Devolved Administrations

Chart — Percentage Turnout vs Election Year

N.Ireland: 1998/9 = 70, 2003 = 64, 2007 = 62.9, 2011 = 55.7
Scotland: 1998/9 = 58.8, 2003 = 49.4, 2007 = 51.7, 2011 = 50.4
Wales: 1998/9 = 46.4, 2003 = 38.2, 2007 = 43.5, 2011 = 41.5

Legend: Wales, Scotland, N.Ireland

1. **How can we improve turnout in Wales?**
2. **What voting system should we use for elections? Should we use the same voting system across all elections?**
3. **Should a "none of the above"/"re open nominations" options be added to the ballot paper?**
4. **Would workplace voting be a useful introduction?**
5. **What is the best day(s) on which to hold elections?**
6. **Should we explore the introduction of electronic/online voting?**
7. **How do we improve education about British and Welsh democracy?**

Youth

Young people are routinely criticized for not participating however, young people are increasingly engaged through social media, are more likely to sign a petition or take part in a protest. However, they are less likely to vote.

In Wales, Young People (aged 0-25) are represented by Funky Dragon, the Youth Assembly for Wales. The Youth Assembly is made up of 100 representatives, aged between 11 and 25 representing all 22 local authorities in Wales.

Additionally, community councils are able to appoint up to two youth representatives, although in practice very few do this. A youth representative has the same rights to speak at council meetings but

are not able to vote. Pondardawe Town Council announced the appointment of 2 youth representatives in January 2014.

1. **What is the most effective way to engage young people with democracy?**
2. **If Wales is given the powers to decide local electoral arrangements, should 16-17 year olds be given the vote?**
3. **Should communities be required to have youth representation?**
4. **Should youth representatives be able to vote in the council?**

Media

There is growing demand in Wales for more coverage of Welsh politics. A campaign is currently running for a Newnight Cymru, in both English and Welsh, covering Welsh politics.

There is a continuing decline in the circulation of local newspapers and whilst some areas are moving online, this is leaving those who do not interact with the internet without local information.

1. **How do we maintain freedom of the press whilst ensuring they vigorously scrutinise Government (local and national)?**
2. **How do we improve access to Welsh news programming?**
3. **How do we support local/hyper local media?**