

Consultation on petition P-03-262 Wales Peace Institute
Response from Dr Peter Sutch

To the petitions committee of the National Assembly of Wales

Proposal for a Peace Institute for Wales:

On receipt of an invitation to respond to the proposal from the Petitions Committee of the National Assembly for Wales I am happy to offer my view on the proposal as currently formulated.

I am unclear whether I am being asked to respond as an academic with a research interest in the field of international politics, as a trustee of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs or as the Chairman of the United Nations Association – Wales. My view is influenced by each of these roles but the substantive comments are a reflection of my personal view rather than the view of Cardiff University, WCIA or UNA-Wales.

In response to the Committee's questions

The proposal for a Peace Institute for Wales is certainly reasonable and I would imagine that it is also feasible (although the lack of institutional definition is a cause for concern).

I have often thought that Wales lacked a voice on matters relating to Peace, Conflict and Security. While, as the proposal acknowledges, these are not statutory objectives of our National Assembly there is a very strong tradition of internationalism in Welsh public life and Wales has considerable human resources in relevant professions and in the Universities. I have been engaged in several discussions with colleagues in the Universities across Wales and with those I regularly meet at Temple of Peace and Health through the WCIA about the need to find a forum to give voice to this expertise. The prospect of developing the equivalent of Chatham House in Wales (perhaps a rather broader enterprise than that envisaged here) is very attractive to many. My view on the question of the relative importance of such an institute is that Wales should have a voice in these fields of research and that it could, and should, become a source of national pride, contributing to the voice of Wales in the world.

The question of how such an institute is to be constituted is left very unclear. The claim in the penultimate paragraph of the supporting document that the institute should not become a quasi-governmental body rules out many of the models listed in that document. It is unclear how such an institute could be configured both to provide 'scientific', 'academic' and policy and commercially relevant expertise while maintaining the independence necessary to the performance of that task or who the 'great and the good and the academic' advisory/trustee board might be and how they might be selected. Who is to conduct the research or fund it? How is the quality of the research to be guaranteed? I do think the institutional issues are central to the concept of the institute. I think it would be essential to have as broad a remit as possible to ensure the political and ethical neutrality of the institute (rather than of the individuals or groups who contribute to its process). The remit should cover peace and conflict studies broadly and include legal, social, political and economic issues. It should have partnerships with major national organisations where there are already significant bodies of expertise including the Universities, Governmental and international governmental organisations and international non-governmental organisations and private organisations in Wales. Any institute will need a home – a bricks and mortar presence. My immediate view is that the Temple of Peace that already houses the WCIA and the Wales for Africa hub, a highly active legal affairs committee (which is developing a Welsh Forum for International Law and Policy), has partnerships with the International Affairs research group at Cardiff

University and the David Davies Memorial Institute at Aberyswyth University has the potential to meet this need.

Primary barriers to the establishment of the institute are twofold. The first is financial. To launch and sustain an institute of this kind, even one which would ideally become self-funding through research income, would need seed-funding. The second is a matter of institutional support. I think that any such institute would need the support of the principal political, social and educational institutions in Wales. Negotiating any such endorsement would present a challenge but could form a solid basis for progress.

With respect

Dr Peter Sutch.
Cardiff University
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