

Consultation on petition P-03-262 Wales Peace Institute
Response from Mererid Hopwood

Abigail Phillips
Petitions Committee Clerk
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

December 2, 2012

Dear Ms Phillips,

RE: Peace Institute

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to share some thoughts with the Petitions Committee regarding the establishment of a peace institute in Wales. I know that I do not need to mention the importance of achieving peace in our world. I will therefore summarise some of the ways in which a peace institute could contribute toward achieving that aim.

In the first place, the institute is a natural development of the Assembly's initiative in relation to tackling violence. There have already been moves to eradicate bullying from schools, and there was a debate on the Assembly floor recently about smacking children. Carwyn Jones himself was one of those who stated that physical violence should not be used as a means of punishment. Given that war lies at one extreme of the physical violence scale, and that killing the soldiers and citizens of 'enemy' leaders is the ultimate act of physical punishment, I am sure that the notion of establishing a peace institute would have cross-party support in the Bay. An institute of this kind would be able to research ways of avoiding the use of physical violence when opposing parties disagree—whether these be countries or individuals. As parents and teachers, we have long understood that problems are not solved by smacking children, but rather by reasoning with them. Agreement is reached through dialogue. A peace institute could teach us the way to extend this principle to the world of adults and to the international world. This is therefore an opportunity for Wales to take another step on the journey that it has already begun.

Secondly, a peace institute would allow us to set the educational plans of the armed forces in a fairer context. At present, young people are being influenced by a strong television advertising campaign that portrays a soldier's life as one of adventure and romance. The armed forces also provide educational packs for adults, and they have a presence at recruitment centres on the high street. There is no public forum with the same high profile in Wales that allows young people to see the other side of this story, thereby allowing them to make a balanced choice. By establishing a peace institute, the Assembly could ensure that everyone who is considering a career in the armed forces understands the long-term opportunities for employment, the long-term risks (physical and mental), and the implications of resettling in civil society after serving in the field. The Assembly has a responsibility to give everyone this information as part of its work on careers and its educational duties.

Thirdly, a peace institute would be able to conduct thorough research into the social and socio-environmental costs of the work undertaken by the armed forces in Wales. Although the Assembly has no army, it has exercised its right to marshal the lands and airspace of Wales for military purposes. Robust research is needed in this area to allow Assembly Members to make wise and measured decisions—research that weighs up the advantages and disadvantages for Wales and for the world. This is precisely the kind of research that a peace institute could undertake.

On September 21, International Peace Day, the White Book of Carmarthen was opened. This is a delicate, handmade work made from the finest materials, and people from across Wales are invited to sign their names on its pages in order to declare their commitment to working towards peace in our world. The requests from organisations across the country for an opportunity to sign the book have been astonishing. In less than two months, hundreds of Welsh people have signed their names in the book. This is, without doubt, a sign of the earnest wishes of Welsh people to see us leading the way towards world peace. The Assembly could build a truly effective peace institute on the strong foundations of Welsh pacifist traditions. This would perhaps be the most valuable contribution made by the National Assembly to the international stage. I am confident that the Assembly will take this opportunity to press ahead and lay the first cornerstone in place without delay.

Sincerely,
Mererid Hopwood