

PET(4) WPI 46
Petitions Committee

Consultation on petition P-03-262 Wales Peace Institute
Response from Jill Evans MEP

How a Wales Peace Institute Could Inform and Assist the work of the National Assembly for
Wales: Comparisons with Flanders

EDUCATION POLICY

There are many peace institutes throughout the world and if we are to establish one it will, of course, be unique to Wales. That means we have to look at best practise in other countries and select the most important elements as we see them. Education has been a central factor in our discussions. Whilst universities and colleges have a particular interest in an institute of this kind from an academic perspective, we also need to look at its value in terms of school education. The Flemish Peace Institute, with which we have worked closely, also has a strong focus on education. One of its main aims is "providing comprehensive information for the Flemish parliament and the Flemish people, and enriching the democratic operation of Flemish institutions". This in turn will contribute to a more peaceful society. Looking at some of the work done by the FPI can help us envisage the contribution a Peace Institute could make to achieving the same in Wales.

Education and Training

In the field of education, the Government of Wales Act gives the National Assembly powers over, for example, setting standards and monitoring progress, the content of the national curriculum, links between education, training and work and the behaviour of pupils at school and discipline. The Further Education and Training Act 2007 and the Education and Skills Act 2008 enhanced these powers.

There are specific responsibilities in the above acts which could be more effectively carried out with the support of a Wales Peace Institute. The acts allow for resources to be made available for research and policy support under certain circumstances.

For example, the Further Education and Training Act, which came into force in 2007, allows for financing the "carrying out of research relating to education or training" relating to further or post 16 education. It also refers to "The provision of advice and information in connection with, and the carrying out of studies in relation to (a) pre-16 education or training; (b) post-16 education or training; (c) the training of teachers and specialist teaching assistants for schools..." to help participate effectively in education, employment and the community.

The National Curriculum

Within the GCSE Humanities section of the national curriculum at present there is a very clear commitment to look at issues "important to humanity" from an individual and family, local, regional, national and global perspective. Pupils are encouraged to discuss and adopt attitudes and values that inform behaviour and shape a sustainable society: to study "cultural, economic, environmental, historical, moral, political, religious, social, spatial and spiritual factors".

In Unit 4, Conflict and Co-operation, there is, for example, general and specific discussion of war, religion and conflict, terrorism, intolerance and racism, migration and refugees, multiculturalism, protest and democracy. These are crucial issues to address with young people.

The National Assembly has looked at some aspects of this work. The All-Wales Survey of Bullying in Schools, 2009, highlighted a number of key issues that needed to be addressed in forming policy. This month's summary report on The Provision of Safe Places to Play and Hang Out by the Children and Young Peoples Committee identified several problems, including negative stereotypes of children and young people.

According to Welsh Women's Aid, last year half the residents of their refuges were children. In 2008-9 they supported 2,500 children affected by domestic abuse. They have identified the importance of education in changing attitudes and behaviour.

In Flanders, two new cross-curricular attainment targets were adopted in secondary schools in 2009: tolerance and an insight into the role of conflicts. "Remembrance education" was to include the holocaust. A study by the Flemish Peace Institute (FPI) discovered that in Flanders over 80% of secondary and over 60% of primary schools do some peace or remembrance education. It is broadly classified under the headings tolerance, democratic attitudes and non-violence. Particular attention is focussed on what they call 'micro peace', which encompasses bullying. The teachers tend to create their own projects rather than buy into others, although they are always looking for more structured projects that they can adapt to their own schools while fitting the requirements of the curriculum. One of the recommendations of the Peace Institute study was to set up an interactive portal website where data could be exchanged, together with better quality control and more information and training for teachers.

Flemish Society

The Peace and Society Research Programme, being run by the FPI, looks at perceptions, attitudes and commitments to peace and violence. A survey of over a thousand people was carried out. The study examines 'micro-peace' in families, on the streets, in schools and cities. It looks at how local networks and civil society contribute to a peaceful society. Specifically, the FPI has done a study on the role of violence in the social world of young people. It also initiated a project for young people called "The Power of Your Voice", which included visits to the Flemish Parliament.

The Flemish Parliament

In general terms the FPI provides policy advice notes, information for debates, organises conferences. One policy advice note was on peace and the economy, which is an issue relevant to us given the use of Welsh land, sea and airspace by the military, as well as military related industries and educational sponsorship here.

Opportunities for Wales

- The Government of Wales Act gives wide powers to the Welsh government in terms of education and training. A Peace Institute could help develop the curriculum, provide teaching information, assess current practise and provide practical support in achieving the aims of tolerance, democracy and peace set out by the government.

- The emphasis on young people in the work of the FPI is of particular interest to Wales. A Wales Peace Institute could address similar issues, working in partnership with other organisations, but with the emphasis firmly on the highest quality research.
- The FPI is working with the European Commission on developing a new network to combat violence amongst and against young people in urban areas. European funding will be available for this project. There could be an opportunity for Wales to participate.
- Given that our histories are linked inextricably by war, it is appropriate the Flemish Peace Institute has been so supportive of attempts to establish a Wales Peace Institute. The Director of the FPI has stated that they would consider undertaking research for the National Assembly should the members so wish. This could be an important element in the Assembly's decision.

Jill Evans
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