

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education  
Committee  
Y 1,000 diwrnod cyntaf | First 1,000 Days

FTD 11

Ymateb gan: Rhwydwaith Bwydo Babanod Cymru  
Response from: Wales Infant Feeding Network (WIFN)

The Wales Infant Feeding Network is the professional forum representing health service infant feeding leads in Welsh Health Boards. It also includes educators and academics in Welsh universities. The network includes lactation specialists and clinical representatives from maternity, health visiting, neonatal services across Wales.

*“In sheer, raw, bottom line economic terms breastfeeding may be the single best investment a country can make.”*

Keith Hansen World Bank Global Practices Vice President, speaking at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual ABM (Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine) Summit on Breastfeeding June 2015

## SITUATION

Breastfeeding is widely acknowledged as a fundamentally important public health issue and a key determinant of not just future child health but also the achievement of optimal educational and societal potential.

As such it would be assumed to be integral to any proposed national strategy on the “First 1000 days”. WIFN members were concerned to note that despite smoking in pregnancy and immunisation being specifically referenced, there was no mention of the huge potential impact of infant feeding in the letter of 12/12/16 outlining the consultation on the First 1000 days

The case for the impact of infant feeding on the health of children in their First 1,000 days and thus the need for its priority inclusion in the proposed National Assembly for Wales’s consultation is made clearly in **The Lancet series 2016**

<http://www.thelancet.com/series/breastfeeding>

The Lancet Series sets out the negative public health impact and costs to health service expenditure when formula feeding is the norm and provides useful expert guidance for transformational change in national infant feeding trends

## **BACKGROUND**

Wales published a national strategy for breastfeeding in 2001 (“Investing in a Better Start, Promoting Breastfeeding in Wales” National Assembly for Wales 2001). Those present at the launch heard Rhodri Morgan the then First Minister state that “*Breastfeeding would be a public health priority in Wales for the next 20 years*”

Despite this admirable aim little has changed in Wales as regards breastfeeding over the last 16 years. In many Welsh communities’ breastfeeding remains largely absent and the negative health outcomes of high levels of infant formula feeding are endemic in terms of infant & child ill health e.g myriad infections, dental decay, paediatric hospital admissions, childhood obesity

**The World Breastfeeding Trends initiative** report of November 2016

Identified clear weaknesses in national activity as regards breastfeeding in Wales compared to Scotland & Northern Ireland

Summary here

<https://ukbreastfeedingtrends.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/press-release.pdf>

Link to whole of part 1 of report – please see summary report card p8 for reference to specific weaknesses identified in Wales & then Wales specific report card P13

<https://ukbreastfeedingtrends.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/wbti-uk-report-2016-part-1-update.pdf>

## **ASSESSMENT**

WIFN met in September 2016 to scope the situation as regards infant feeding in Wales. The expert group drafted 5 key aims to be achieved if there is to be any improvement in breastfeeding rates in Wales

**1. National leadership & an effective local infant feeding workforce structure is needed in Wales**

2. Address the privileged commercial position of infant formula within Welsh NHS maternity units. Generic products should be provided rather than giving NHS endorsement to expensive branded products
3. Full implementation and maintenance of UNICEF Baby Friendly care standards framework as a minimum across all services caring for mothers and babies. Health Boards must be given time frames for compliance with this.
4. Future proof and ensure sustainability for the future in health care provision. Review & improve the education of health professionals regarding infant feeding across all services
5. Create a culture for breastfeeding to thrive in Welsh communities

Appropriate, adequate funding, political will and strong national leadership will be required to transform the infant feeding culture of Wales. Without positive, sustained action it is unlikely that breastfeeding rates will improve in Wales and the well documented health problems of our nation will remain unchanged

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- WIFN recommends that the First 1000 days consultation embeds infant feeding firmly as the foundation of infant and child health and that positive action is taken to change the status quo as regards breastfeeding in Wales
- The UNICEF Baby Friendly Call to Action (2016) requires that National Infant Feeding Strategy Boards be set up in the devolved governments of the UK. This is the essential first step to achieving a change in the culture of infant feeding in Wales

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/advocacy/call-to-action/>

*“Most women in Wales enter the maternity care system intending to breastfeed their babies, most new mothers in Wales walk out of early post natal care NOT breastfeeding – this HAS to change”*

*WIFN 2016*