

P-05-861 Make political education a compulsory element of the new national curriculum, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 04.04.19

Dear David John Rowlands AM,

Re – Reply to response to petition - P-05-861

I have been asked to provide my comments in relation to the Ministers recent response to my active petition. In support of the responses that I am about to give, I have included a number of relevant images.

However, before I offer my thoughts on this matter, I want to start by thanking the petitions committee for their support and efforts on this subject. I am glad to see that this is an issue that is now being discussed. I would particularly like to thank Leanne Wood AM, who clearly understates the concerns and urgency of the cause.

I will now seek to address the two key issues that have been highlighted in the Minister's response. However, I am also available for further discussion, should that be deemed appropriate.

Date for the planned introduction of life lessons and political education

As the Welsh assembly has recently begun debating the *Senedd and Elections (Wales) bill*, with the intention of lowering the voting ages to 16 in time for the 2021 election, it appears to me that developments are progressing in the wrong order.

I fully support the voting age being lowered to 16 and do believe there are vast benefits that will come from this. However, this is a measure that should be taken in conjunction with a political education and not something that should be done without it. In my opinion, neglecting education risks alienating young people and would fail to 'empower' young people as the proposed bill suggests.

Yet there is also a risk that there could be a much greater and serious impact.

We are well aware that there is much misinformation on the internet, and due to the digital nature of their lives, this is therefore bound to particularly affect young people. If we are to expect our young people to fully engage and enjoy this crucial new electoral development, then we have to give them the tools to understand, engage and criticise the politics that they are to be part of. Otherwise, we risk them being targeted by potentially dangerous political organisations. Without such education, they will not have the basic skills to criticise, assess or evaluate the information that they are being given.

In my opinion, this cannot be underestimated and poses a huge risk to any benefits that the new proposed legislation might bring.

Whilst I do appreciate that the new curriculum needs to be rolled out in a timely and affordable manner, I fully support the committee's concerns that this needs to happen much faster.

Perhaps there is therefore an interim solution that the minister could offer in order to temporarily close this gulf. In my opinion, schools should be urged and encouraged to give basic level lessons BEFORE the new changes take effect.

However, to take the burden off teachers, perhaps there is even the possibility of inviting outside organisations into schools to do the presenting for them. There are a few apolitical organisations that would offer such services – Politics4Youth being one of them.

There therefore appears to be ways around this issue and I believe that these should be adequately pursued.

Explicitly on the curriculum

I fully understand that the curriculum should not be a series of prescriptive tick boxes that teachers have to rigorously abide by. However, that said, there is obviously scope for key subject to be highlighted, as is the case with the traditional compulsory subjects.

In my view, political education – and life lessons – have to be added to this category of key subjects. Whilst it would be hoped that schools would automatically deem it important, considering the other expectations that they face, it is little wonder that it is often forgotten.

It is therefore for the Welsh government to ensure that political education and life lessons are now deemed to be important. In my view, current legislation and the apparent new curriculum do not sufficiently elevate the importance of these subjects and that is a concern.

In addition to this, the Minister's comments leave me concerned that she is perhaps underestimating the scale of the issue.

Whilst schools might be 'encouraged' to offer such lessons, in practice this is not actually what happens at present.

I have briefly spoken to some of my school age relatives and these are the comments that were made.

Hey lovely. Can I ask a quick question 😊 I am currently working on something for my petition and I'm just looking to gather some information on whether people are being taught about politics in school? Have you had any lessons about it at all? 😊

15:03

No, nothing really, no lessons or anything xx

Hey lovely. Can I ask a quick question 😊 I am currently working on something for my petition and I'm just looking to gather some information on whether people are being taught about politics in school? Have you had any lessons about it at all? 😊

10:23

15:02

No not really xx

In addition to this, I asked my Twitter followers what they experience was and again, the response was pretty unanimous.



Working on something for my petition, can you answer this brief question for me, please? 😊

Did you receive any political education in school?



If they don't teach it now, then I don't see how further 'encouraging' them to do so will change anything. It therefore stands to reason, that life lessons and political education should be made a compulsory aspect of the curriculum.

Until political education is given the importance and emphasis that it deserves, young people will never be taught enough about the subject. I believe, that this will worsen the current democratic deficit, affecting people from poorer backgrounds and leaving them further alienated from the politics in Wales.

I hope that you will seriously consider my comments in response to this issue and I hope to see changes made.

Kind regards,

Kaiesha Ceryn Page