

A quick guide for teachers to the National Assembly for Wales

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Background to the National Assembly for Wales

In July 1997, The UK Government published a White Paper, A Voice for Wales, which outlined proposals for devolution in Wales. These proposals were endorsed in the referendum of 18 September 1997 (Yes= 50.3% No= 49.7%) Parliament subsequently passed the Government of Wales Act 1998, which established the National Assembly for Wales.

The National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999 enabled the transfer of the devolved powers and responsibilities from the Secretary of State for Wales to the Assembly on 1 July 1999. Subsequently, many Acts of Parliament have given powers to the Assembly.

Key Dates:

15 May 1997	Referendums(Scotland and Wales) Bill introduced to Parliament- this allowed a referendum on devolution to be held
22 July 1997	White Paper on devolution published- this gave the details of what the National Assembly for Wales would do if the people of Wales voted 'Yes'
18 September 1997	Referendum held
19 September 1997	Result is a 'Yes' Majority
27 November 1997	Government of Wales Bill introduced in Commons- this is the beginning of passing the Act that will allow a National Assembly for Wales
31 July 1998	Government of Wales Bill receives Royal Assent- The Queen signs the Government of Wales Bill so it becomes the Government of Wales Act
6 May 1999	Elections for Assembly Members

12 May 1999	First meeting of the Assembly
26 May 1999	Opening of National Assembly
1 July 1999	Transfer of Powers to the National Assembly
16 Oct 2000	Labour/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in the Assembly announced
1 May 2003	Second Elections
7 May 2003	First plenary of Second Assembly
5 June 2003	HM The Queen officially opens the second term of the Assembly
31 March 2004	The Richard Commission's Report into the powers and electoral arrangements of the National Assembly is published.
17 May 2005	Legislation to reform the National Assembly for Wales is announced in the Queen's speech. The full details of the Government of Wales (Amendment) Bill are to be published in a forthcoming White Paper.
15 June 2005	The White Paper on the reform of the Assembly 'Better Governance for Wales' is published.
8 Dec 2005	Publication of the new Government of Wales Bill and first reading in the Commons.
18 Jan 2006	Committee on the Government of Wales Bill established
1 March 2006	Royal opening of the Senedd Building



25 July 2006

Government of Wales Bill receives Royal Assent. The Queen signs the Government of Wales Bill so it becomes the Government of Wales Act 2006. This allows Wales to apply for law-making powers on a case-by-case basis.

3 May 2007

The third National Assembly for Wales elections

28 June 2007

Coalition Government announced

The role of the National Assembly for Wales

The National Assembly for Wales prioritises and allocates money provided to it by the UK Government Treasury to help the people of Wales. Within its devolved (transferred powers), the Assembly develops policy and approves legislation that reflects the needs of the people of Wales. Decisions about these issues are made by those voted into office by the people of Wales. These elected representatives are called Assembly Members. The Secretary for State for Wales and Members of Parliament (MPs) from Welsh Constituencies continue to have seats in Westminster.

From May 2007 elections the National Assembly for Wales can pass primary legislation in devolved areas like health and education (Government of Wales Act 2006) but the House of Commons and Lords have to agree in principle first. The National Assembly will need to obtain permission or 'legislative competence' before having the power to make Measures (Assembly Laws) in relation to a particular area of devolved government. One method of gaining 'legislative competence' is through amending clauses in Parliamentary Bills passing through Parliament. The other method involves conferring legislative competence by using a procedure called a 'Legislative Competence Order' (LCOs). LCOs have to be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State. Once the National Assembly for Wales is granted legislative competence, it can begin the process of passing Assembly Measures (Welsh Laws)

The National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

First Minister, Ministers and Deputy Ministers

The Welsh Assembly Government suggests the majority of new legislation and is responsible for government departments and spending.



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

The National Assembly for Wales is made up of **60** Assembly Members (AMs)

40 Constituency AMs


20 Regional AMs

The National Assembly for Wales scrutinises the Welsh Assembly Government, scrutinises legislation and passes secondary legislation.

In most parliamentary bodies, including Westminster and the Scottish Parliament, the government (executive) and the parliament (legislature) are legally separate.

On 17 July 2005, The Secretary of State for Wales, Rt Hon Peter Hain MP, introduced a White Paper entitled 'Better Governance for Wales'. This White Paper set out the Government's proposal for legislation to change the provisions currently in the Government of Wales Act in three respects:

- To create a new executive structure for the Assembly
- To enhance the Assembly's legislative powers; and
- To reform the electoral system



This will mean that the parliament and the government of the Assembly are now formally and legally separate.

The Welsh Assembly Government is known as the executive and the National Assembly for Wales is the legislature.

How does the National Assembly function?

The National Assembly for Wales (the 60 elected Assembly Members) and the Welsh Assembly Government (selected Members of the majority party/parties) constitute the corporate body known as 'The National Assembly for Wales'.

1. Plenary

Plenary is a meeting of all Assembly Members which takes place in the Siambr. It is the decision-making and law-making forum of the Assembly. Plenary takes place on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons in public and is broadcast live on S4C 2.

The plenary is chaired by the Presiding Officer with a Deputy presiding Officer deputising as necessary. They are elected by all Assembly Members.

The Presiding Officer publishes an agenda for each meeting in advance. Each week, at least 45 minutes are allocated to Oral Questions to the First Minister. In addition, each Cabinet Minister responds to Oral Questions at least once every four weeks. Assembly Members debate the issues on the agenda and vote on the motions tabled.

Assembly Members can propose a topic for a Short Debate before the end of Plenary. With The Presiding Officer's approval, an Assembly Member can propose the Assembly immediately consider a matter of urgent public importance. Time is allocated to discuss:

- The allocation of the Assembly budget;
- Reports submitted by Committees
- Matters relating to the European Union

Draft LCOs and Assembly Measures

Individual Members can enter ballots for the opportunity to propose legislation or to select a topic for the weekly Short Debate

2. Committees

An Assembly Committee is a group of Assembly Members who meet regularly to scrutinise policy and legislation.

Most meet in public and are generally 'party-balanced'.

Legislative Committees

The Legislative Committees consider and advise the Assembly on proposed legislation. Generally, a Committee will be created to consider an individual piece of legislation and will be wound up when it is passed.

Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Committees examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government and associated public bodies

Other Committees

The Audit Committee

The Audit Committee examines reports prepared by the Auditor General for Wales on the accounts of the Assembly and other public bodies and on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which the Assembly has used its resources. It does this so that the people of Wales can be confident that their money is being spent wisely and well.

The Equality of Opportunity Committee

Examines the Assembly's activities to promote equal opportunity.

The European and External Affairs Committee

The purpose of the European and External Affairs Committee is to review the Assembly's involvement in European and international organisations.

The Committee on Standards of Conduct

Consider any matters relating to the conduct of Members.

The Finance Committee

Examines any proposals by the government which involves expenditure

The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister

Business Committee

The Business Committee is chaired by the Presiding Officer. It is attended by the Leader of the House and a Business Manager from each of the other parties. The Committee advises on the management of the Assembly's work.

3. The Siambr

Each Assembly Member has a designated seat in the Siambr with a touchscreen computer they can access during debates. They sit in a horse shoe shape facing the Presiding Officer.

The touchscreen computers provides Assembly Members with access to electronic mail and information. Assembly Members can send a message to the Presiding Officer to request permission to speak.

The Assembly is fully bilingual and Assembly Members speak in their preferred language, English or Welsh. Simultaneous translation, Welsh to English, is provided for all Plenary and Committee meetings.

Members vote by pressing buttons on a console on their desks. They can choose to vote 'Yes' 'No' or to 'Abstain'. The results are displayed instantly on screens within the Siambr.

Minutes of each Plenary, Scrutiny Committee, Standing Committee and Legislative Committee are produced and are called the Record of Proceedings. This is a verbatim record edited for accuracy, consistency and to avoid unnecessary repetition. Fully bilingual transcripts of proceedings are published on the Assembly's website within 24 hours of each Plenary.

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Devolved Matters

The Government of Wales Act 2006 provides a mechanism for the Assembly to acquire, on a case by case basis, more powers to make its own laws. Within the Act, the legislative competence of the Assembly is defined by reference to 'fields' and 'matters'

A field is a broad subject area, e.g. highways and transport, housing;
A matter is a specific defined policy area within a field.

The 20 fields are:

Field 1: agriculture, fisheries, forestry
and rural development

Field 2: ancient monuments and historic buildings

Field 3: culture



Field 4: economic development
Field 5: education and training
Field 6: environment
Field 7: fire and rescue services and
promotion of fire safety
Field 8: food
Field 9: health and health services
Field 10: highways and transport
Field 11: housing
Field 12: local government
Field 13: National Assembly for Wales
Field 14: public administration
Field 15: social welfare
Field 16: sport and recreation
Field 17: tourism
Field 18: town and country planning
Field 19: water and flood defence
Field 20: Welsh language

Reserved Matters

Only the UK Parliament can pass laws on reserved matters.

Defence Foreign Affairs National Security Trade and Industry

Social Security Broadcasting Equal Opportunities Laws on the mis-
use of drugs Electricity, Gas, Coal and Nuclear Energy

Teacher's pay Fox hunting Police

Who's who?

To find out who your Member is visit the home page and type in your
postcode - www.assemblywales.org

What do Assembly Members do?

- Represent the people who live in the region or constituency
- Answer letters, e-mails and enquiries
- Attend plenary Meetings (Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons)
- Ask questions to the Welsh Assembly Government
- Work in Committees
- Work with other AMs and MPs
- Attend party business

How the National Assembly for Wales is elected?

Elections are held every four years and voters have two votes. Of the 60 Assembly Members elected, 40 represent constituencies and are elected by the 'First Past the Post' system, the system by which MPs are elected to the House of Commons. Another 20 Members represent regions. The regional Members are elected by a form of proportional representation known as the Additional Member System. This system goes some way towards ensuring that the overall number of seats held by each political party reflects the share of the vote that the party receives.

Each region covers between 7-9 constituencies. There are 4 regional Assembly Members elected to each of the 5 regions.

The 5 regions are:

- North Wales
- Mid and West Wales
- South Wales East
- South Wales West
- South Wales Central

Under the Government of Wales Act 2006 candidates standing for the Assembly elections in 2007 will not be able to stand in a constituency and on the regional lists

The Additional Member System

The 4 additional or 'top up' Members are identified by:

Counting the number of votes cast for each party list on the electors' second ballot paper

Dividing the number of each party's list votes by the number of constituency seats won by that party under FPTP plus 1.

Repeat the calculation for the second and fourth additional Member; in each case divide the party list vote by the number of constituency seats plus 1, plus any additional member seats allocated in previous rounds.

Example:

	Party A	Party B	Party C	Party D
Total party votes cast	116	63	61	56
FPTP seats won	4	0	2	2
1 st Additional Seat	/5=23.2	/1=63.0 elected	/3=20.3	/3=18.7
2nd Additional Seat	/5=23.2	/2=31.5 elected	/3=20.3	/3=18.7
3 rd Additional Seat	/5=23.2 elected	/3=21.0 elected	/3=20.3	/3=18.7
4 th Additional Seat	/6=19.3	/3=21.0 elected	/3=20.3	/3=18.7
Additional Members	1	3	0	0
Total AMs	5	3	2	2

Election Results

The elections for the first National Assembly were held on 6 May 1999 following the 1997 referendum result.

1997 Referendum Result

	% Yes	% No	% Turn-out
Wales	50.3	49.7	50.3
Scotland	74.4	25.6	61.5

1979 Referendum Result

	% Yes	% No	% Turn-out
Wales	20.3	79.7	58.8
Scotland	51.6	48.4	63.6

1999 Election Results

Party	FPTP	AMS	(FPTP+AMS)
Labour	27	1	28
Plaid Cymru	9	8	17
Liberal Democrats	3	3	6
Conservative	1	8	9
Total	40	20	60

2003 Election Results

Party	FPTP	AMS	(FPTP+AMS)
Labour*	30	0	30
Plaid Cymru	5	7	12
Liberal Democrats	3	3	6
Conservative	1	10	11
Forward Wales	1	0	1
Total	40	20	60

2007 Election Results

Party	FPTP	AMS	(FPTP+AMS)
Labour	24	2	26
Plaid Cymru	7	8	15
Liberal Democrats	3	3	6
Conservative	5	7	12
Other	1	0	1
Total	40	20	60

Facts about the Senedd building

The National Assembly for Wales' building, the Senedd, is located in Cardiff Bay. It was designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership to reflect the Assembly's core philosophy of openness and transparency.

Energy consumption and waste is minimised by the application of renewable technologies.

To find out more visit the following:

www.assemblywales.org

Word Bank

Act	A law passed by the UK Parliament that has received Royal Assent i.e. which has been signed by the Queen.
Assembly	The National Assembly for Wales is the 'Parliament for Wales'
Bill	A set of proposals that might become law, if Parliament agrees to it.
Coalition	An arrangement between more than one political party, when no party wins more than half of the total number of seats.
Committee	A group of AMs from different parties.
Constituency	A constituency is a defined geographical area that returns a Member of Parliament(MP) to Parliament at Westminster or an Assembly Member (AM) to the National Assembly for Wales. AMs represent their constituents in the Assembly.
Constituency AMs	Wales is divided up into 40 constituencies and elects 40 AMs through the First Past the Post system

Debate	A discussion that takes place between AMs that often leads to a vote. Debates are usually held in the 'Siambr'
Devolution	The delegation of power by central government to local or regional administration. Devolution in Wales means moving political power to make decisions about Wales from Parliament in Westminster and the Welsh Office to the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff
Democracy	Everyone in the country having a say in what happens and what is decided. In a democratic country, there are elections where the people have a choice of who they want to be in charge.
Devolved matters	The issues that are decided upon in Wales. The devolved matters are the areas where the National Assembly for Wales has decision making power.
Field	A broad subject area, e.g. Highways and transport
General Election	A general election is held at least every five years. It is when almost everybody aged 18 or over is entitled to vote for their Member of Parliament. The party with the most MPs usually forms the government.

Laws	These are rules deciding what can and cannot be done in a country. The National Assembly can pass laws on devolved matters.
Legislation	The process of making laws
Legislative Competence Orders	A type of secondary or 'subordinate' legislation which transfers specific powers from Parliament to the Assembly. Each new LCO will add a new matter (or matters) into the relevant field in Schedule 5, providing the Assembly with the power to make Measures within the policy areas defined by the matter. An LCO can be proposed by the Welsh Assembly Government, an Assembly committee or an individual Member.
Manifesto	List of promises produced by a political party. Produced by parties before an election suggesting the policies they will follow if they are elected to power.
Matters	A specific defined policy area within a field (Listed in Schedule 5 to the 2006 Act)
Measure	Assembly laws. A Measure will have similar effect to an Act of Parliament
Ministers	AMs who are also members of the Welsh Assembly Government

Parliament	A group of elected representatives that debates and decides upon new laws
Participation	'Taking part in the democratic process' People can participate by voting, standing for an election, joining a political party or taking part in a campaign to change something you feel strongly about.
Parties	The different groups of people that try to get elected to a Parliament or Assembly.
Plenary	The full meeting of all the Assembly Members
Policies	The ideas that the different parties have for changing things
Presiding Officer	Chairs the plenary meeting and makes sure that the business of the Assembly is carried out on time.
Primary legislation	These are laws passed by Parliament in Westminster. Laws start as Bills which are debated in both Houses of Parliament (the House of Commons and the House of Lords). Once a Bill has passed through Parliament it is given Royal Assent by the monarch and becomes an Act of Parliament. It then becomes law of the land.
Referendum	A special vote when a government wants to find out what the people think about a particular subject.

Region	Wales is divided up into 40 constituencies for elections. It is also divided up into 5 regions. Four regional AMs are elected to represent these regions
Regional AMs	There are 20 regional AMs in the National Assembly for Wales
Reserved matters	The issues that are decided at UK level such as Defence, Foreign Affairs, Employment Law, taxes and Social Security
Scrutinise	When AMs question the Welsh Assembly Government (executive)
Subordinate legislation	This relates to laws that are made by government Ministers under powers given to them by Parliament. These laws do not go through the same parliamentary process as primary legislation.
Westminster	The Houses of Parliament are situated in Westminster, London.
White paper	A report outlining a set of proposals, which is published and discussed before a Bill is created