National Assembly for Wales

The Year in Review

Annual report 2008 – 2009
Summary

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account.

The National Assembly for Wales - the year in figures

23,688   The number of children involved in the Assembly's education workshops

98   The number of petitions received during the year

2,500   The number of people questioned as part of the Assembly's survey of people's understanding of the devolution settlement

4,425   The number of written research papers and documents produced by the Assembly's Members' Research Service

71   The number of Plenary meetings held during the year

4,990   The number of oral questions tabled

2,242   The number of written questions tabled

85   The number of Legislative Committee meetings held over the year

5   The number of new Legislation Committees established to manage the Assembly's law-making process

257   The number of events held in the Senedd during the year

8   The number of ballots held by the Presiding Officer to allow Assembly Members to propose laws for Wales

2,106,100   The number of written words translated by the Assembly's translation service

146,528   The number of visitors to the Senedd during 08/09

95%   The percentage of paper purchased by the Assembly that is from recycled sources or from FSC certified suppliers

3,000   The number of votes cast in the Assembly's Welsh Idol poll, won by Ray Gravell

4,783,900   The number of words published by the Record of Proceedings during the past year

Highlights at a glance

April 2008
Siambr Hywel, Europe's first dedicated youth debating chamber is opened by Prince Charles.

April 2008
The Assembly introduces its online e-petitioning system, resulting in a significant increase in the number of submitted petitions.

6 May 2008
The Assembly passed its first law, the NHS Redress Measure — the first Welsh law passed since the 10th century.

August 2008
The National Assembly appoints an independent panel to review Assembly Members' pay and allowances

October 2008
The results of the largest political survey in Wales, commissioned by the National Assembly, showed that 70% of people wanted either partial or full devolution for Wales.

November 2008
The National Assembly for Wales welcomed His Majesty King Letsie III of Lesotho to Cardiff Bay, as part of an initiative to develop inter-parliamentary links between Wales and Lesotho.

December 2008
The Presiding Officer welcomed his counterparts from Scotland and Northern Ireland to the National Assembly for Wales.

January 2009
Her Royal Highness, The Countess of Wessex visited the Senedd in her capacity as patron of Mencap.

January 2009
The Assembly is named 'Wales's most improved employer' in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index, and one of the top 100 gay-friendly places to work in the UK.

Representing the interests of Wales and its people

Representing value for money

As part of its commitment to the principles of transparency, in August 2008 the National Assembly appointed an independent review panel, chaired by Sir Roger Jones, to review Assembly Members' financial support. The panel's remit was to review and make recommended changes to all aspects of financial support available to Assembly Members, including pay and allowances for travel, accommodation, constituency offices and support staff.

The panel's report was published on July 6 2009. A copy of the report can be found on the Assembly's website.

Representing the young people of Wales

As part of the Assembly's efforts to encourage young people to engage in the democratic process, the Assembly's former debating chamber in Tŷ Hywel has been transformed into the world's first dedicated youth debating chamber. Called Siambr Hywel, it provides a forum and space to allow young people to debate under the same rules that govern the Assembly, with young speakers requesting and being called to speak.

The Assembly also launched a new outreach education service for south Wales in September 08, which reached 80 schools and colleges, while 287 schools and colleges from the north Wales and mid and west Wales regions received presentations through our outreach programme. During the year the education team collectively delivered presentations and workshops to 683 schools and colleges, reaching an audience of 23,688 pupils.

Representing Wales's interests through technology

In April 2008, the National Assembly augmented its e-democracy services, including the launch of our e-petitioning system, our improved webcasting service Senedd.tv, e-forums and a "quick vote" facility for online consultations for Committee inquiries.

Representing your interests through Petitions

In the two months since its launch in April 2008, the e-Petitions system contributed a fifth of the total of petitions for the whole year, proof that user-friendly ways of engaging with the Assembly helped people to realise that their voices and opinions were not just heard, but also acted upon.

During the reporting period, the Committee received its 150th petition since the start of the Third Assembly from the Ammanford Junior Gateway Club, which called for free swimming for children and young people throughout the year.

Representing the Assembly in the community

The year saw plans for the introduction of the Assembly's Outreach bus, which will be based predominantly in north Wales, and will bring the Assembly to the doorstep of communities across the region, allowing people access to give their opinion on and input into the Assembly's work.

The Llywydd also led a campaign to involve more people who have traditionally experienced barriers to participation with the Assembly by undertaking a tour of Wales's five electoral regions to speak with representative groups to gauge their views on how they can better engage with the Assembly.

Making laws for Wales

From 1945 to 1999, the UK Parliament passed only 11 Acts which applied solely to Wales – an average of one every five years. Between 1999 and 2007, a further eight 'Wales-only' Acts were passed which averages one 'Welsh' Act each year.

History was made at the National Assembly for Wales on Tuesday, 6 May 2008, with the passing of the first ever Assembly Measure, the NHS Redress (Wales) Measure 2008. It was the first piece of primary legislation made by the National Assembly, the first Welsh law to be passed since the 10th century and the first bilingual law ever to be passed in Britain.

In addition, between May 2008 and 31 March 2009:

— Four Assembly Measures were passed
— Three Legislative Competence Orders were made conferring legislative powers on the Assembly
— Another seven Orders had undergone pre-legislative scrutiny by Assembly Committees, including two proposed by backbench Members
— The first Committee-proposed Measure was introduced during 2008/09 - National Assembly for Wales Commissioner for Standards Measure developed by the Committee on Standards of Conduct proposing to give the Commissioner for Standards a statutory role.

In order to achieve this:

— Legislative Committees held 85 meeting to consider all proposed Orders and Measures, and produced seven reports
— The Subordinate Legislation Committee met on 32 occasions and reported on all the laid Statutory Instruments, proposed Measures and has commenced scrutiny of UK Bills
— The Presiding Officer held eight ballots for Member proposed legislation – four for proposals for Legislative Competence Orders and four for proposals for Assembly Measures.

Full details of the progress of Orders and Measures are compiled by the Assembly's Members' Research Service, and can be found on the Assembly's website.

Holding the Welsh Government to account

Effective scrutiny of a government's work is at the heart of any democratic process, and this work is undertaken by the National Assembly in a number of ways, with various parts of the Assembly's staff all playing an important part in allowing Assembly Members to hold the Welsh Government to account. While much of this process is done through scrutiny Committees (see section below), the Assembly holds the Welsh Government to account in a number of other ways.

Between April 2008 and March 2009, 71 Plenary meetings were held.

During the period of this report, a total of 4,990 Oral Questions were tabled – a breakdown of where those questions were directed is below:

	Number of Oral Questions Tabled
First Minister	1,046
Minister for Health and Social Services	585
Minister for the Economy and Transport	557
Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills	538
Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing	503
Minister for Social Justice and Local Government	465
Minister for Heritage	438
Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery	416
Minister for Rural Affairs	398
Counsel General	26
Assembly Commission	18

During the period of this report six Urgent Questions were asked on subjects ranging from job losses in Wales to the development of wind farms.

2,242 Written Assembly Questions were tabled during this period. Over the course of the year, the Assembly held 257 non-legislative scrutiny Committee meetings.

Helping Assembly Members to hold the Welsh Government to account

During the year, 3,593 pieces of written work were produced by the Members' Research Service, including 3,428 replies to individual enquiries, and 579 pieces of research work informed Assembly Members' work as they either held Welsh Ministers to account in scrutiny Committees or made laws for Wales in legislation Committees.

Committees that hold the Welsh Government to account

As part of their role in holding the Welsh Government to account, Assembly Committees critically examine issues such as how Ministers are spending public money and how effective policy is at achieving what it set out to do. In short, the National Assembly's scrutiny Committees, makes sure that the Welsh Government is accountable for its actions, on behalf of the people of Wales.

Committees recommend ways in which Government policies could be more robust and its expenditure more effective, efficient and economical. Committees engage proactively and innovatively with individuals and organisations which can articulate the voice and experience of the people of Wales.

Over the course of the year, the Assembly held 257 non-legislative scrutiny Committee meetings.

Involving the people of Wales in holding the Welsh Government to account

As part of the Assembly's commitment to ensuring the opinions of the people of Wales underpin all our work, including that of holding the government to account, a number of Assembly Committees undertook innovative ways of engaging the public in their work.

For example, the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee inquiry on presumed consent for organ donation in Wales held online discussion forums on the Assembly website, and two short questionnaires were produced which could be used in schools and in the National Assembly's buildings. People were also allowed to vote on the issue online.

The Enterprise and Learning Committee decided to work informally to undertake an inquiry into the support for people with dyslexia in Wales. The Committee wanted to place the citizens of Wales at the heart of its scrutiny and so met children with dyslexia and their families in an informal coffee morning, to give them the opportunity to air their views openly to Committee members. This also gave members the opportunity to hear first hand evidence from those with dyslexia about the barriers that they and their families face daily.

When investigating advocacy services for children and young people, members of the Children and Young People Committee met with young people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds, in seven locations in Wales. They wanted to make sure the discussions took place in an environment where children and young people felt comfortable and were able to talk about difficult or sensitive issues without feeling intimated.

Looking ahead

The past year has shown the benefits associated with increasing engagement with Assembly's work, and we will continue to place a strong emphasis on the Assembly's strategic objective of increasing participation in the democratic process.