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## **Key Stage 3 activities Guide to the Assembly for teachers**



## **What is the National Assembly for Wales?**

**The National Assembly for Wales is made up of 60 Assembly Members from across Wales. They are elected by the people of Wales to represent them and their communities, make laws for Wales and to ensure the Welsh Government is doing its job properly.**

# **Guide to the Assembly: information for teachers**

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## **Why was the National Assembly for Wales established?**

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 led to the establishment of 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.

## **When were the first elections held?**

The first elections were held on 6 May 1999 and the first meeting of the Assembly was held on 12 May in the same year.

## **Assembly Members**

The National Assembly for Wales is made up of **60** Assembly Members:  
40 Constituency Members;  
20 Regional Members.

### **How are Assembly Members 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. These constituencies are the same as the constituencies which elect MPs. Another 20 Members represent regions. The regional Members are elected by a form of proportional representation known as the Additional Member System.

### **What do Assembly Members do?**

Assembly Members:

- Represent the people who live in the region or constituency
- Deal with constituents' problems
- Answer letters, emails and enquiries
- Attend Plenary meetings (Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons)
- Challenge and scrutinise the Welsh Government
- Serve on committees
- Attend party business

### **What happens in 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 the Assembly's website (Senedd.tv).

Plenary is chaired by the Presiding Officer with a Deputy Presiding Officer available 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.

Each Assembly Member has a designated seat in the Siambr with a touch screen computer they can access during debates. They sit in a half circle facing the Presiding Officer.

The touch screen computers provide 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, Welsh or English. 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' or 'No' or to 'Abstain'. The results are displayed instantly on screens within the Chamber.

Minutes of each Plenary and Committee meeting are produced and are called the Record of Proceedings. This is a verbatim record edited for accuracy, consistency and to avoid unnecessary repetition. The Record of Proceedings is published on the Assembly's website.

### **What is a committee?**

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' (ie the membership is drawn from all parties represented in the Assembly).

### **Who is the Welsh Government?**

The Welsh Government consists of the First Minister, the Welsh Ministers, the Deputy Welsh Ministers and the Counsel General.

### **Who appoints the Welsh Government?**

The National Assembly must appoint the First Minister within 28 days of an election, otherwise a new Assembly election must be held. The appointment will be approved by HM the Queen. The Welsh Ministers and Deputy Ministers are appointed by the First Minister, with the Queen's approval.

### **What can they do?**

The Welsh Government can legislate within 20 defined subject areas. These subject areas are set out in Schedule 7 of the Government of Wales Act (2006).

### **What is the Government of Wales Act?**

The Government of Wales Act (2006) was drafted in Westminster. The Act gave the Welsh Government the right to make new Welsh Laws, called Assembly Measures. The first Assembly Measure became law in July 2008. The 22 Measures passed between 2007 and 2011 will continue to be known as Assembly Measures. Following a 'yes' vote in the Referendum held on 03 March 2011, from May 2011 the Assembly will be able to pass laws called 'Acts of the Assembly'.

### **What can't they do?**

There are some areas of policy which are not 'devolved'. This means that all the decisions about legislation in this area are still made by the UK Government in Westminster. These areas include Defence, the Home Office and Tax and Benefits.

### **What does Counsel General mean?**

The Counsel General is the Chief Legal Adviser to the Welsh Government. The Counsel General does not have to be an AM. The Counsel General is nominated by the First Minister and appointed by the Queen.

### **What is the difference between the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales?**

The Welsh Government is responsible for developing and implementing policies. The Government also has control of the budget. The National Assembly scrutinises the work of the Government.

### **Guide to the Legislative Process**

The Government of Wales Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act") provided a mechanism for the Assembly to acquire, on a case-by-case basis, more powers to make its own laws.

In the areas in which it had legislative competence, the Assembly could make its own laws, known as "**Measures**". A Measure would have similar effect to an Act of Parliament.

During the Third Assembly, between 2007 - 2011, twenty-two Measures were passed by the Assembly. These Welsh laws will continue to be known as Assembly Measures.

## **Referendum 2011**

Following a 'yes' vote in the referendum, the National Assembly for Wales will now be able to pass laws on all subjects in the 20 devolved areas without first needing the agreement of the UK Parliament. The result of the referendum does not mean that the Assembly can make laws in more areas than before.

Assembly laws will no longer be called Assembly Measures. Proposed laws will now be called Bills, and enacted laws will be called Acts. The Measures made since 2007 will continue to be called Assembly Measures and will continue to have the same legal effect. What will change is that it will not be possible to make any more Measures and new laws made by the Assembly will be called Acts.

### **Devolved Subjects:**

- 01 Agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development
- 02 Ancient monuments and historic buildings
- 03 Culture
- 04 Economic development
- 05 Education and training
- 06 Environment
- 07 Fire and rescue services and promotion of fire safety
- 08 Food
- 09 Health and health services
- 10 Highways and transport
- 11 Housing
- 12 Local government
- 13 National Assembly for Wales
- 14 Public administration
- 15 Social welfare
- 16 Sport and recreation
- 17 Tourism
- 18 Town and country planning
- 19 Water and flood defence
- 20 Welsh language