



Changemakers

Improving young people's
understanding of making
political and social change in
Wales

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<https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/changemakers>

Foreword

The pace of change, politics and media today continues to accelerate. In this context we face many disruptive influences and influencers. It is therefore important that we all take ownership of making the change we want to see.

Change means understanding the issues that are affecting us, who makes the decisions and holds the purse strings, and how to campaign effectively. This in turn improves our lives and that of those around us.

Campaigning effectively requires an appreciation that we can hold different, even opposite, views. We must learn and appreciate the ability to see the world through other people's eyes. Now more than ever, we all need to understand how to respect difference and do what we can to understand and find compromise.

The structures of government at all levels, from the international to the hyperlocal, are now so complex and intertwined, it can be difficult for us to know where to start. Without a way to learn, this could disempower people of all ages and experiences.

We cannot afford for people to feel disempowered. We need more voices in our politics, not fewer. More people exercising their democratic rights and using their voices, not fewer. More diversity of experience and thought, not less.

I am very pleased this research report, supported by The Open University's Open Societal Challenges and The Open University in Wales, is being published.

This work is an important contribution to our understanding of what and how young people want to learn about making change. It will contribute to turning that understanding into resources young people can use to develop key skills, and indeed become changemakers themselves.

These resources highlight some fantastic examples of young people in Wales and elsewhere taking responsibility for making change happen, both within their own communities and much further afield. These can be an inspiration to all of us as we seek to follow their lead.

I want to record my thanks to those who gave their time, opinions, and experiences to the project. I congratulate my academic and professional services colleagues on completing this work to such a high standard.

I encourage policymakers, educators, and youth organisations to read and act on their findings.



Ben Lewis

Director, The Open University in Wales

Executive summary

Research suggests that young people in the UK are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy and less likely to participate in formal politics, such as voting and joining a political party – although they may participate in other forms of political life.

Education in politics, democracy, and citizenship is key to engagement.

However, research also suggests that there is a need for young people – and adults – to receive a better grounding in political education that supports their decision-making and engagement.

Using a mixed methods approach and working with young Welsh citizens aged 16–24, the Changemakers project explores what young Welsh people know about UK political institutions and making political and social change, and the type of resource(s) they need to improve their understanding.

The research has led to the following recommendations:

- A focus on formal politics/political engagement is important for researchers/organisations working in the area of citizenship and democracy, as young people are less likely to participate in formal politics
- All UK curriculums, including the Welsh curriculum, would benefit from a more specific focus on political education and active citizenship/political action
- Citizenship education needs to be extended to adults/the general public as part of a public information strategy
- It is essential that citizenship education, whether in school or post-school, covers how the various strata of local, national, and UK-wide government

agencies differ/impact daily lives and who and what is responsible for tackling political concerns, as well as socio-historical and cultural constructions around this, and how individual political concerns are understood and felt at a localised, geographical level

- As well as the need to increase understanding of how to make political and social change generally, there is a particular need to increase understanding of the role and workings of devolved parliaments
- Online educational resources are essential, and should include socio-historical and socio-political context, introducing the multi-layered connections between UK nations, and deciphering the complexities of individual political institutions, focusing on political and social change.

What is clear is the need for more clarity to both enable future generations to receive grounding in political education that supports their future decision-making and engagement, and further research to establish a clear sense of what drives the reluctance to consistently engage. Alongside moves toward engagement is a need for a clearer sense of what comprises daily politics for Welsh young people, and the disconnect between the experiences of everyday life and formal politics.

Alongside these recommendations, Changemakers also led to the creation of a multilingual educational resource (an interactive website) aimed at young Welsh people aged 16-24. The website will enable young Welsh people to become active citizens by improving their understanding of how to make political and social change in the UK. For more information on the research aims and outcomes, methodology, findings, the website development, and conclusions, recommendations, and next steps, read on.

Introduction

'Changemakers' is an ambitious Open Societal Challenges project at The Open University, aimed at improving the political understanding of young people aged 16-24 in the UK, through the development of resource(s) that help them to better understand how to be active citizens. This is important, as research shows that young people are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy and less likely to participate in formal politics.

Active citizenship is the idea that someone can be an active political citizen; they can actively try and make change (or indeed prevent it). They can be a 'changemaker'. To do so, they need to be motivated to participate as well as kept informed about politics, democracy, and the workings of society. We developed the concept of Changemakers to address this.

Initially focusing on Wales and young Welsh people aged 16-24, the Changemakers project has used a variety of research methods, such as online surveys and focus groups, to capture how young people feel and what they know about UK political institutions and making political and social change, and the type of resource(s) they need to improve their understanding.

This project will help policymakers, educators and youth organisations to learn about cost-effective ways to increase understanding of and participation in politics of young people, enabling more representative decision-making.

More broadly, the project will enable young people to better understand how they can become active citizens.

This report outlines the key findings of the research so far, and forms an important part of The Open University in Wales's active citizenship activity, working with partner organisations in Wales to understand Welsh young people's views, political understanding, and needs.

For more information about the Changemakers project, please visit <https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/changemakers>.

Changemakers aims

'Changemakers' will generate robust educational resource(s) that enable young people (16-24) to become active citizens by improving their understanding of how to make political and social change in the UK

This will be achieved through the development of educational resource(s) post-secondary/compulsory education

The research will initially focus on Wales, working with young Welsh citizens and OU Wales.

Changemakers outcomes

To enable young people (16-24) to better understand how to make political and social change in the UK as 'active citizens'

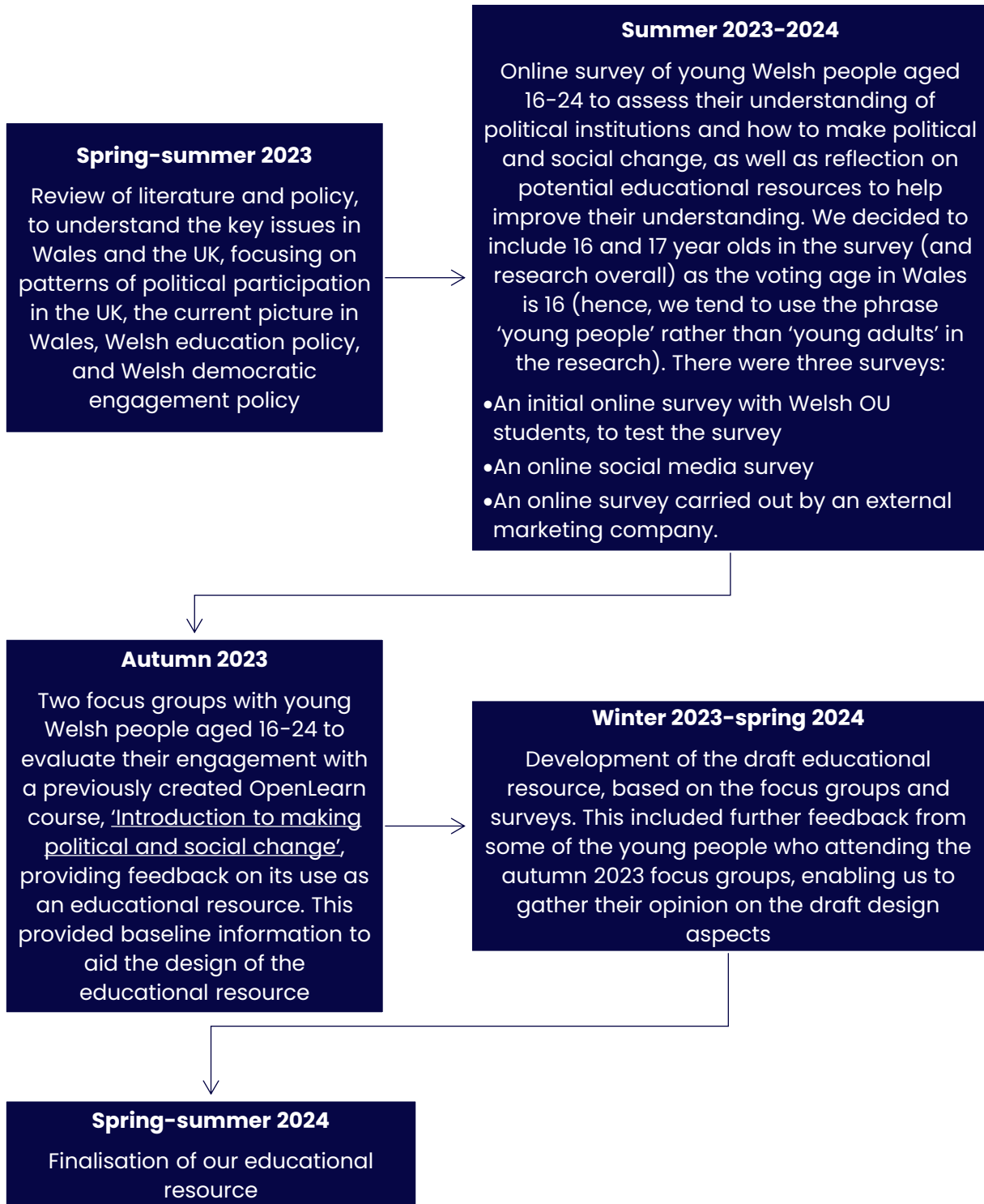
To positively impact political participation in later adulthood via the upskilling and engagement engendered

To help policy makers and educators learn cost-effective ways to increase understanding of, and participation in, politics of young people. Further benefitting societal cohesion, civic engagement, and enabling more representative decision-making

To influence the development of young people's citizenship information and political education post-secondary/compulsory education.

Methodology

We took a mixed methods research approach, to capture as much rich information as possible. The key activities and timings were:



Policy scene setting

Patterns of political participation in the UK

Patterns of UK-wide youth political behaviour have attracted notice in the last few decades, as research into political engagement – such as voting, political party membership, and civic responsibility – consistently seem to suggest that young people are turning away from *formal* political processes – defined as political participation connected with institutions (Norris, 2011; Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Henn and Foard; 2012). Indeed, recent House of Commons research shows that young people in the UK are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy and less likely to participate in formal politics, such as voting and joining a political party – although they may participate in *other* forms of political life (Uberoi and Johnston, 2022).

Recent research commissioned by the Institute of Welsh Affairs resonates with this, citing ‘information gaps’, which vary according to the quality of political education received at school and growing up around family invested in politics, as being the biggest barrier to voting in Wales. The IWA’s ‘Building Bridges’ study also adds that ‘there is a need to ‘win hearts and minds’ through emphasis on why democracy is important rather than simply what it is’ (Moore, 2023: 8). Indeed, research suggests that exposure to citizenship or ‘civic’ education has an impact on engaged citizenship (Weinberg and Flinders, 2019). However, in relation to current UK citizenship education, it seems that despite the potential for comprehensive and innovate citizenship education in the UK (and the many excellent ‘local’ examples in practice), different and changing policies/curricula,

inadequate and non-specialist teacher training, and the challenge of competing resources and lack of space in curricula/schools, have contributed to 'asymmetric' citizenship education delivery across and in the four UK nations (Jerome et al., 2022: 14). The new Welsh curriculum (the 'Curriculum for Wales'), for example, has been criticised by some for a lack of specific focus on political education (Moore et al., 2022), with calls for political education to be a required topic and distinct subject (Mathias, 2022). There has also been a shift away from active citizenship teaching in England (Weinberg and Flinders, 2019) and – across the four UK nations, including Wales – more of a focus on 'soft' active citizenship such as volunteering and helping others rather than critical political action (Jerome et al., 2022).

Despite assumptions about the place of digital technology in young people's socio-political lives, there is no straightforward evidence that young people are transferring their social media engagement to online political participation. Studies suggest that rather than re-engaging young people who have lost interest in politics, social media may provide an outlet for some young people who are already politically engaged (Keating and Melis, 2017), whilst many perform tactical processes of dis/engagement with social media platforms to manage their socio-political online identities and influences (Gangneux, 2021). It is also important to consider the complexity of young people's political participation. Indeed, failing to account for intersectional identity factors such as sex and gender, ethnicity, disabilities, sexuality, and social class makes it difficult to understand, and therefore unpick, barriers to youth political engagement. The significance of identity factors was highlighted in a recent study by the House of Commons (Uberoi and Johnston, 2022), which broke

down some aspects of political behaviour in the UK by age, ethnicity, social grade, gender and disabilities. The study concluded that while some groups may show similar levels of disengagement, the drivers for this can differ significantly. The report also suggests that rather than being apathetic, some young people may have a lack of understanding about how to participate politically. However, the report (2022: 16) also notes that while 18–25-year-olds ‘are most dissatisfied with how democracy works in the UK... they are least likely to say it is difficult to understand what is going on in politics and government.’ So, while there are common age-related themes at play, the picture is a complex one.

Youth participation in Wales – what is the current picture?

Beyond broader literature and research focusing on UK-wide youth political participation, it is important to contextualise some of the specifics of youth political participation alongside the impact of devolution in Wales.

A relatively recent critique of the ‘politics of hope’ supposition connected with devolution (the idea that devolution will lead to better youth political engagement) argued that despite the lowering of the voting age for devolved elections in Wales, youth support for devolution is a complex picture, linked to ‘geographical scales of political, social and cultural identification’ (Pearce, 2019: 172). That said, opinion polling in the last few years clearly suggests younger people (18–24, plus 25–34) are now more supportive of independence compared to older people (Nation.Cymru, 2023), and are more likely to support the devolution of more powers to the Senedd with support decreasing the older

the age group (Nation.Cymru, 2020). This is a change compared to ten or so years ago, when support for devolution was at similar levels across age groups (Scully, 2013). Devolution can be thought of as a kind of ‘territorial rescaling’ (Pearce, 2019: 157). Conceiving this geographically offers a perspective on the social and cultural impacts of devolution as well as the political processes of refocusing greater responsibility towards the Welsh Parliament (Senedd) and Government. Research into young people’s perceptions of political concerns in Wales suggests that these do connect with localised issues, and are also influenced by perceptions of meaningful representation, which in turn influences participation.

Research studies have provided a mixed picture into young people’s political participation in Wales, with the overall picture suggesting they are ambiguous and not always clear on how the various strata of local, national, and UK-wide government agencies affect their daily lives directly. Research by The Electoral Commission (2022) suggested young people in Wales need more education and support to engage in local and national politics, with participants reporting that they felt they did not know enough about local candidates, the parties, or the democratic process in general. The WISERD (Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data) Education Multi-cohort Study, which focused on secondary school pupils in years 7, 9 and 11, suggests most Welsh young people have an ambivalence towards politics and voting, with gaps in knowledge about politics (Foster et al., 2022). In fact, this study showed that only 37% of Year 11 pupils voted in the Welsh Parliament elections (the first year eligible).

Initiatives such as the 'Use Your Voice' campaign in 2021 to encourage young Welsh people to sign up to vote had mixed results, though these must be understood against the seismic backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic. Interestingly, WISERD research does suggest that in 2020, 41% of Welsh young people were more interested in politics than they had been before the pandemic (Foster, 2021). It has been surmised that the clear lines between the role the Welsh Government played in the pandemic (and the role of the UK Government) and how this affected day-to-day life may have made it easier for young people to consider the relevance of politics in their lives, but further research is needed here. What is at the root of this is young people's complex, less understood ideas around who and what should be responsible for tackling political concerns. These ideas may not just be formulated upon knowledge of where power lies, but socio-historical and cultural constructions around this, and how individual political concerns are understood and felt at a localised, geographical level.

The results of recent studies into young people's voting behaviour in Wales have encouraged the Welsh Government to set up the Democratic Engagement Grant (2023), which currently funds 11 projects targeting those less likely to be involved in the democratic process. These include The Politics Project, The Innovate Trust, The Boys and Girls Club Wales, and My Society, all of which use innovative approaches to consider how the most disengaged groups of young people can be folded into democratic processes.

Welsh youth policy, initiatives, and where to next?

Since devolution, the powers and responsibilities in Wales have been divided across three levels: local authorities (local level), the Welsh Parliament and Welsh Government (national level), and UK Parliament/UK government (UK level). The Welsh Parliament has direct law-making powers in various policy areas, including education, without the need to consult Westminster, bar in relation to 'reserved matters'. Education, youth, and democratic engagement have been a key focus of the Welsh Parliament in various ways.

Following the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act in 2020 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act in 2021, the voting age in Welsh Parliament and local elections has been lowered to 16, and local authorities have the power to change their voting system to improve electoral participation (from 'first past the post' to 'single transferrable vote').

The Welsh Government 'Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure' (2011) made it a formal duty for Welsh Ministers to consider the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when making legislation and decisions of a strategic nature. Following this measure, policies relevant to youth political participation at the Welsh level since 2013 have included the Youth Engagement and Progression Plan (2013), Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), The Children's Rights Scheme (2021), and The Children and Young People's Plan (2022), and of course most recently the Welsh Government's commitment to the Democratic Engagement Grant (2023) as discussed earlier.

Whilst the Youth Engagement and Progression Plan (2013) was more firmly focused on reducing the number of young people aged between 11-25 not in education, employment or training, it placed a strong emphasis on leadership and local authorities needing to be accountable to implementation plans that will demonstrate properly engaging young people in opportunities and civic experiences. One of the foremost ambitions of The Children's Right Scheme (2021) was to make sure children and young people are recognised as active citizens with a vital role to play in the Wales of the future. Following an in-depth inquiry, the Scheme promotes an active Engagement Model, Participation Standards, and foregrounds the need for accessible information. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) aims to ensure that future generations have at least the same quality of life as currently exists but ideally improves it. As part of this aim, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has emphasised the importance of involving people of all ages and diverse backgrounds, including young people. The Children and Young People's Plan (2022) solidifies several key commitments to overcoming barriers to help children and young people fulfil their potential and highlights a commitment to young people being 'listened to'.

There have been critiques of lost opportunities since devolution afforded the people and governance of Wales a chance to refocus politically toward a hierarchy of their own concept of needs. Despite the voting age being lowered to 16, in 2021 only around half of 16 and 17 year olds were registered to vote (Dhesi, 2022; Foster, 2021). A report into the votes-at-16 impact in Scotland, which the author goes on to relate to Wales, notes that key to political engagement is improvements in political education including an emphasis on

informal spaces, alongside more specific civic teaching, to share socio-political views and experiences (Huebner, 2021). This position is supported by the OU in Wales/IWA report 'Citizens Voices, People's News' which goes into depth about the importance of political education. Moore et al. (2022) explicitly state the need for the Welsh Government to strengthen democracy and citizenship education in schools, improve teaching guidance by overtly focusing on this during PGCE training, and ensuring that modern history and the politics of Wales are well embedded within the curriculum, including through new GCSE qualifications. These recommendations are echoed by the work of Andreouli et al. (2024), who note that the new Welsh curriculum needs to be supported by additional funds to manage the extra workload of the new curriculum, a repository of resources/examples to monitor how citizenship is being taught to develop supportive guidance, with greater recognition of the importance of democracy and citizenship education more generally. Furthermore, Moore et al.'s (2022) report suggests the importance in a robust Task and Finish Group to deliver a range of high-quality and well disseminated education resources, co-produced with citizens, together with a public information campaign aimed at engaging diverse groups – adults as well as school age.

The deficit in engagement from young people in the most recent elections in Wales needs to be understood against an overall lower local election turnout of 38.7% in 2022, 4% lower than in 2017. While turnout for the last Welsh Parliament election in 2021 was the highest ever at 46.6%, this still means, as the Welsh Parliament notes, that over half of people who could vote didn't (Moss, 2024). The engagement varied across the country, but the overall picture suggests a devolved election has failed to engage much of the electorate. Indeed, Welsh

Parliament turnout has never exceeded 50%, and was just 46.3% in the first election in 1999 – something described at the time as a 'huge deficit'. A key focus for the Welsh Government remains to engage new voters, but there needs to be a deeper understanding of why there is not more of a pull to the ballot box across all age groups. Despite over two decades of devolved government in Wales, uncertainty amongst potential younger voters remains, and better understandings of what demotivates or motivates political participation is needed. The various research studies and responsive policies in Wales support the assessment that uncertainty is impacting significantly on young Welsh political engagement, and overall point to resources which focus on re-engaging interest in existing democratic processes. The London/England-centric nature of some the UK news media has been identified as a factor in lack of political engagement/understanding, with some people 'not consciously aware of the lack of a Welsh dimension to the news they consumed' (Moore et al., 2022: 27).

The Welsh Government recognises some of the issues, demonstrated by its commitment to the development of political education resources for use in Welsh schools (for instance, resources developed with the Association of Citizenship Teaching to support politics teaching), something also championed by the Electoral Reform Society Cymru and its 'Our Voices Heard' project (Blair and Mathias, 2018). There is a risk, though, that the focus on schools' autonomy in relation to delivery of these resources leaves them at risk of huge variation – both in delivery and efficacy, as recognised by Andreouli et al. (2024) who note the challenge of inconsistent implementation of the new Welsh curriculum across schools and the lack of guidance. The Welsh Government has recently

agreed the creation of new GCSEs in History and Social Studies, with Welsh history and politics key components (Qualifications Wales, 2023). While not compulsory to study, these newly reformed qualifications could lead to future opportunities. As Moore et al. (2022: 25) note about the then proposed GCSE Social Studies, 'its widespread adoption in Welsh schools could and should lead to specialist PGCE courses for Social Studies teachers who could then also deliver specialist Democracy and Citizenship education lessons to all students at secondary level'.

Andreouli et al. (2024) also note the importance of the new Welsh curriculum providing time/space for student discussion, connecting to young people's day to day concerns, and opportunities for young people to engage with policy makers/civil society. What is clear is the need for more clarity to both enable future generations to receive grounding in political education that supports their future decision-making and engagement, and further research to establish a clear sense of what drives the reluctance to consistently engage. Alongside moves toward engagement is a need for a clearer sense of what comprises daily politics for Welsh young people, and the disconnect between the experiences of everyday life and formal politics. In 2022 the Welsh Government issued The Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper to consult the Welsh population more widely about ways in which the government can significantly improve engagement. Combined with the Welsh Government's newest focus on modernising elections in Wales, as well as the creation of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (since renamed Medr) which will oversee all post-16 education across Wales from 2024 with a commitment to lifelong learning and civic engagement built into its mission, the moment for

delving into what comprises meaningful democracy for young people in Wales, and delivering impactful citizenship education, feels like it may have arrived.

Digging into the data: survey results

A key part of our Changemakers work was three surveys aimed at capturing young people's understanding and ideas about social and political changemaking in Wales. Building on our initial literature and policy review, we had the opportunity to capture some really important data by refracting our reach through three different surveys:

- An initial online survey with Welsh OU students, to test the survey [60 respondents]
- An online social media survey (via X/Twitter) [204 respondents]
- An online survey carried out by an external marketing company [100 respondents].

In total we reached over 350 Welsh young people aged 16-24. Due to the targeted nature of the online survey carried out by an external marketing company, the sample answers for that survey (n=100) can be considered representative. 55% of the sample were female (n=55), 42% male (n=42), and 3% (n=3) Non-binary. There was good representation across the 16-24 age range: 30% (n=30) were aged 16-18, 30% (n=30) 19-21 and 40% (n=40) 22-24. Less than half (47%, n=47) were Welsh speakers. In terms of the highest level of education completed; 24% (n=24) had achieved up to secondary school level, 45% (n=45) further education level, 23% (n=23) undergraduate, and 8% (n=8)

post-graduate study. The online student survey and social media survey were less representative, although still provided fascinating data from a range of young people in the target group.

This unique opportunity to understand survey responses from young people highlighted the following key issues (please see the Appendix for the survey questions).

Survey key finding 1

The majority of young Welsh people stated that they understood what 'active citizenship' is, without a prompt.

Survey key finding 2

Many Welsh young people felt more confident about their ability to influence political change through the Welsh Parliament, as opposed to the UK Parliament. However, many Welsh Young people were less confident in their *understanding* of how to make political and social change through the Welsh Parliament compared to the UK Parliament.

Survey key finding 3

Despite feeling more confident that they can influence change in Wales, the surveys all suggest that many young people in Wales lack knowledge about the tools to impact change in both the UK and Welsh Parliaments. Barriers can be logistics focused – not knowing who or where to contact. Indeed, many young people lack understanding of how parliaments operate and their focus, which could be the result of this having a limited curriculum focus at secondary

school. Indeed, across two of the surveys (OU student survey and the external marketing survey), a high percentage of respondents said they did not learn about politics or social change at secondary school. Of the people who did learn about it at school, more found it useful than not useful in relation to understanding how to make political and social change through both the UK and the Welsh Parliament.

Survey key finding 4

The survey revealed the significance of social media when learning about making social and political change. In two of the surveys (OU student survey and external marketing survey), significantly over half the respondents chose social media from a potential nine sources of political and social change sources of information (a third of the social media survey respondents selected it). Facebook, Tik Tok, Instagram and Twitter all scored highly as key social media sources. The surveys had been carefully formulated to capture as complex an understanding of young people's political understanding and behaviour as possible, thus our question 'If you selected social media, how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change through the UK Parliament / Senedd Cymru?' revealed to us that although social media might be a key source of information, it is deemed by many Welsh young people to be less useful for understanding how to make political or social change through the Welsh Parliament than the UK Parliament.

Survey key finding 5

Another of our key questions about how young Welsh people enact or understand active citizenship was to understand what, if any, political action they had taken part in. Generally, fewer respondents had tried to make change through the Welsh Parliament compared to the UK Parliament. Of the ones who had, this was more often through signing a petition than other forms of action.

Survey key finding 6

Many young Welsh people are more confident in their understanding of how to make political and social change *outside* of parliaments (examples given included campaigning locally, raising awareness on social media, or creating a petition). Of those young people who have tried to make political change outside of parliaments, media activism (which includes social media) was a key way. Doing something in the local community and creating/signing a non-parliamentary petition were also popular answers.

Survey key finding 7 *

Of the multiple options listed, an online course was the most popular format for learning about how to make political and social change, with a video resource, online booklet/text, and a website also popular. Respondents were keen that resources were quick to complete, with 10–20 minutes the most popular answer, followed by 5–10 minutes.

In terms of important design elements, easy to understand language was the most popular of the options listed. In terms of content elements, explanations of

how political institutions work, explanations of issues/areas/laws each Parliament covers, and explanations of who to contact/where to contact were the most popular of the given options.

*Please note, due to the timing of the external marketing survey in relation to the educational resource design/build, these questions were only included in the first two surveys, and not the external marketing survey.

Working with young people

To further unpick some of the content, design, and format issues discussed in the surveys, we held two online focus groups with young Welsh people aged 16–24. Each focus group consisted of nine young people, plus a member of staff from the relevant youth organisation (Pembrokeshire Youth and Grange Youth), as well as the OU research team who led the sessions.

The aim of the focus groups was to evaluate the young people’s engagement with a previously created 10 hour long VLE-based OpenLearn course, [‘Introduction to making political and social change’](#) (The Open University, 2022), written and design by the lead author of this report and branded and endorsed by the UK Parliament, Welsh Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly. By providing feedback on its use as an educational resource, the focus groups gave us baseline information to aid the design of the future educational resource, building on some of the feedback already gathered through the online surveys, as well as a grounded way into the discussion for the young people.

The focus groups highlighted many important findings.

Focus group finding 1

The majority of participants (n=15/19) said that the course improved their understanding of what ‘active citizenship’ is. Only one participant said it did not.

"I didn't really know much about being an active citizen before the course, so it was quite informative. I think that the examples like Greta Thunberg were good because... you've already heard of her and it's a real life example."

"I think that the definition... wasn't too complicated, but it was also pretty detailed. I think [the definition in the course] was a good basic understanding of what active citizenship is as well as the real life examples and then using climate change as examples of global change... I would say it improved my understanding."

"...the real life examples of how you can be an active citizen put into perspective what the idea of active citizenship is."

Focus group finding 2

The majority of participants (n=14/19) said the course improved their understanding of how to make political and social change as active citizens.

"I think for me... it pointed you in the right direction of who to contact and where it went to."

"I found the amount of detail was good, but maybe just doing it in a way that was easier to understand, especially for beginners [would be useful]."

"You know you were able to... go on to that part of the website and kind of see [who to contact] and I found it very useful [that] there were links in the course itself to take me directly to where I needed to go to have a closer look. Otherwise, I wouldn't have known where to start looking for that kind of information."

"I did find that it did point me in the right direction... but also there were parts [which] I found a bit repetitive and maybe not as useful. So, there were elements where it went really into depth about the... different parts of Parliament and different parts of the UK. But it focused a lot on the politics and less on... how to make political change. I don't know how engaging it would be, especially [for] someone who you know isn't that interested or doesn't know a lot. I found... you might get a bit lost."

"I really liked how the course explained to young people how they can use social media or other mediums to kind of promote social change. Because I think sometimes there's a disconnect between young people and how they can articulate what changes they [want to] see, especially because the political sphere essentially affects the future generation, which is a lot of us in this room, so it's really nice to see that it is accessible to everyone because I think before this I did see people use social media online to kind of promote certain policies or see changes in the way the government runs I suppose, but I didn't really know much about it and I think this course gave me a better idea of how I can go about doing that."

"I think maybe more visual aids and tools like infographics [would be useful]. I learn a lot more from that as opposed to large text because I have a better awareness of what being an active citizen is in terms of social changes, but I would say I think it would improve and be enhanced greatly if there were more visual tools."

Focus group finding 3

Only four of the participants (n=4/19) said the course improved their understanding of how to make political and social change in the UK through the UK Parliament/devolved parliaments. Around two thirds (n=12/19) said maybe.

"It had some really useful links, so... the resources that you showed were really useful in my opinion, but the actual information given seemed a bit of an information document, information overload, sort of like a textbook. So maybe if you... split it up with something like questions or summaries or something that was a bit easier to sort of process. Not that it was difficult to understand. I just think it was a lot to put in those pages and it was quite repetitive in the Welsh and the Scottish and the English [sections]. I think maybe if it was done in the different way than it would be more useful... But I like the resources."

"I think what we noticed... was that the focus on political change [was] quite prevalent and that was quite useful. The petitions system, I think most of us didn't know a lot about [that]. So that definitely was useful. But I think making social change wasn't as present. I took away how I can make political [change] but not social as much."

"Devolution often does end up being, well, confusing. As for being a UK Government, most of their decisions only affect England and there could be a list of here are the devolved powers for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, this is what they can address. Here is what the UK Government can solve. And if you are wanting to target Wales, for example, if it's to do with education, you go to the Welsh Government instead of trying to go along to the UK Government."

"I think it can be frustrating when you're trying to find the right pathway, so if you have an issue you feel passionate about, who do you go to and how long will it take you. Because especially if, as a lot of young people, if you feel strongly about an issue, you feel very passionate about it. So, when you don't find an easy route, it tends to be quite frustrating. But I think that having the Welsh Government does this and you go here, but Welsh Government doesn't do this and you go to the UK for that, I think that would really help to make sure that the issues get from the head of the person to the MP, to the debate, as quickly as possible and as smoothly as possible."

"I think in terms of the stuff on the UK Parliament, I would say it was a little bit too vague in the sense that it made it sound really easy to go on to contact a lord or go and have your debate be discussed in Parliament. And I think it didn't really highlight exactly how hard that is. It was good, but just maybe a bit wishful."

"I think it describes what you can do in terms of practically, but as with social issues, it's way more complex than doing a petition or a letter or things like that and I think in the course itself, it says if you have an issue, you can do this, but it's never as simple a process in that way, and I think there's a layer in thinking about, like MPs interests, what the committees are actually responsible for and what they can actually do. I think that detail was kind of missing."

"[With the] UK Parliament, I mean obviously we're based in Cardiff, so it's already quite far away physically as well as politically. And so I think there is an element in what these institutions can do. And I think if you don't feel any sense of connections towards this issue, I think it's quite oversimplified in that sense that there's no hope for them to do anything anyway. So doing it might be a pointless exercise."

"I think it helps with knowledge of devolved Parliaments, but not so much the history of those devolved [parliaments]. If I'm being completely honest I just skipped the bit on Northern Ireland because it has no relevance to me, and I just read the bit on the Senedd. But then when it began with the introduction on the devolved parliaments, it would have been nice for those who don't really understand how it works [to have] maybe a list of the powers that the Parliaments hold, rather than thinking where you can find that. So, people could understand, you know, transport, we control things like that."

"I would say it does because obviously it depends on the issue you're campaigning for because if it was like immigration or something, obviously the petition would go through the UK Parliament whereas it's like transport for Wales kind of issue, you're going to go through the Senedd. So, I think it kind of helps you consider that you... have to put your issue into perspective, what your petition is about. But again, it would be helpful if there was a list."

Focus group finding 4

Only two of the participants (n=2/19) said the course improved their understanding of how to make political and social change in the UK outside of the UK parliament/devolved parliaments. Nearly two thirds (n=10/19) said no, with the rest (n=6/19) saying maybe.

"Because [the course] was just so [much of a] political focus – which is again so useful as that's how you can make legal political change and you can do demonstrations of this – but in regard to globally or socially, I just didn't feel like we covered it that much, to be honest."

"I think when you're going through the course there's a lot of information, but one of the problems that I found is it wasn't really interactive. It was just like a wall of text."

"the bit about activism [raising awareness through art] and using blogging and the kind of tools that you can use to promote the changes you want to see, especially the global issues that you want to tackle, I think that was well informed to me as a reader of the course. And especially because they were written in bold, I was prompted to go ahead and search these terms as tools that I can use if I wanted to campaign about something."

Focus group finding 5

The majority of the participants (n=14/19) did not find the format of the VLE based course engaging, and zero participants said it was the right length.

"Though it doesn't necessarily affect the learning outcome, if we made it a bit more visually appealing and fun, then people would actually want to do it because when I saw it was a lot of writing and it wasn't very engaging. And so, if you had more photos and more colours or something that made it look a bit more enticing and maybe a bit more modern than I would have been a bit more enthusiastic to do it."

"I think what was being said in the course was actually interesting, but the format wasn't that great, like the text should have been different colours to highlight what was [more] important than anything else. There was a lot of images, which was great. And I quite like the videos as well, so if there were more visual things [that would be positive]."

"It did feel like a bit too much to read. I struggle to read huge blocks of text... but the activities were fun overall and the content itself was quite enticing, but just the way in which it was delivered which was block text and then another block text didn't really get me engaged in that sense."

"It would be interesting to have a game on it. So, there's [a] game I saw... where you are a climate leader and you're trying to make change around climate change and then you play this game where you have a timeline of 2050, and you have to do activities and make decisions about how you're going to change something and affect the environment around you. It was super fun to do because obviously you're playing the game but you're learning while you're doing it."

"I don't know if this is something that you can do... [but] if you had to open an AI wizard who can help troubleshoot and ask questions about the things in the topic. If that could be incorporated as well."

"The one thing I admire sometimes about the modules I take at university is sometimes... you have the flexibility of choosing what project you want to do. And obviously with this you choose a social change you're passionate about. So, having a big activity that's open throughout the course. So, you can create and be prompted to create a social campaign or issue, and then having prompts within this activity to build on the knowledge that you are learning as you go along... I don't know if that's possible, but if someone like an AI tool can read it and review it and then give you feedback on it, that's really useful."

Overall, the focus group findings suggested that the course was useful for a general understanding of how to make political change as active citizens, but less useful on the specifics of making change through and outside of political institutions, with the format also deemed unengaging in relation to the content/aims of the course.

It was clear that the participants' top priorities for the new educational resource included visual clarity, some level of interactivity, nation-specific guidance, and

political context. The focus groups proved particularly interesting, as they revealed that overall, the young people still felt an online tool was the most engaging medium for them to learn how to engage politically. They felt there were some changes that could be made to the existing resource, which we acknowledge was originally designed for more detailed engagements with various ways of enacting active citizenship.

It also became clear that we needed to create a resource that focuses more clearly on both political and social change. A key point raised by many of the people we spoke to was the importance of socio-historical and socio-political context, of introducing multi-layered connections between UK nations, and deciphering the complexities of individual political institutions. The focus group feedback suggested this needed to be done in a visually compelling way, incorporating interactivity, colour, and fun design. Real-life scenarios felt to the young people like helpful 'ways in' that they would be able to relate to. Importantly, nation specific guidance to really dig into the nature of interconnected power, and what institutions are responsible for what political issues, consistently came up as a key requirement.

These insights were vital in helping us to develop the next stage of the Changemakers project, and pinpointing what kind of resource will best serve the need of the target demographic.

Creating our educational resource

After amalgamating the findings from the online surveys, the focus groups with young Welsh people, and the literature and policy review, we concluded that a quick to use website with interactive elements would best fulfil the needs of our target demographic in improving their understanding of making political and social change in Wales.

Stage 1 – designing the website

Our first key activity was creating an outline plan for the website design/style, it's infrastructure, and the initial text/content for each section of the website; the latter was partly based on the original OpenLearn course – rewritten as appropriate – along with new text, to make sure we met the needs outlined by the participants. We then hired an external website design company to help us put our plan into practice.

The focus groups had consistent crossover in a number of responses, which were key to the design of the website:

- The participants responded best to the idea of a resource that is colourful, clear, and relatable. The language used therefore needs to feel approachable. They also advocated for less explanatory detail over clear design and visual logic
- A resource should be simplified and directional, i.e., it should act like a 'flow chart' to direct young people from their issue-based problem or scenario to

a potential route(s) for engagement with political systems that might support them to enact change

- Social change and active citizenship were concepts understood often in limited ways and to varying degrees. They therefore wanted something that would be potentially responsive ‘in the moment’ as they became aware of a social or political issue rather than requiring them to know where to look
- They felt a website would work best because it would also be accessible for immediate information, via smartphones – an indication in itself that accessibility is important, as well as understanding the ways in which young people use technology and access information.

The website was therefore planned with a streamlined but attractive design, a clear and accessible layout, and an infrastructure that facilitated engagement with both the different ways to make political and social change and the key social issues pertinent to young people. Crucially, we decided to use a ‘pathway’ approach which focused on HOW young people can make change in ways that feel accessible to them, i.e., directing young people from their issue-based problem or scenario to a potential route(s) for engagement with (political) systems that might support them to enact change, taking into account local context (i.e., Wales and the wider UK and where power lies in relation to different issues).

To help us narrow down the social issues featured on the website we actually asked an extra question in the external market research survey to help pinpoint which ones were of most importance to young Welsh people. That survey revealed mental health/health (46% of 100 respondents), social justice and equal rights (36%), the environment and climate change (30%), education

(36%), and the economy (24%), were the most important issues for the people we surveyed. After cross-referencing these findings with the focus groups and the wider desk research, we decided to highlight the following social issues on the website:

- Climate and Environment
- Economy and Finance
- Education
- Extremism
- Gender equality
- Global issues
- LGBTQI+ equality
- Migration
- Physical and mental health
- Political participation
- Racial equality
- Social justice.

Following on from the focus group feedback, we decided that the website should also highlight examples of real-life young Welsh people whose active citizenship has created demonstrable impact, such as Welsh Youth Parliament Member Angel Ezeadum and Youth Climate Ambassador for Wales, Poppy Stowell-Evans. These examples would be accessible and relatable, alongside examples from more well known public figures.

Stage 2 – developmental feedback

As well as consulting partners at the OU in Wales to make sure our website design met internal and external compliance and accessibility standards, we also checked in with four of our previous focus group participants half-way through the design stage. This allowed us to double check that the website was meeting the needs of our target demographic.

We asked specific questions, rather than asking for general feedback, because the website was based on the feedback we had already gathered (the first focus group and the online surveys) as well as wider research. As such, we did not need feedback on, for example, whether the chosen format was one they personally would use or whether they'd prefer an alternative design, but rather the specifics of the resource were creating in order to finesse it.

We asked the following questions:

- Content: At the top of the home page, some text introduces the website ('Being a Changemaker means small actions can lead to big changes... onwards'). Do you feel this explains what the website is about clearly? What would you need to know?
- Content: At the top of the home page are twelve topic links (under 'what do you care about?'). If we were to reduce them to six, which topics should remain?
- Content: In the middle of the home page is a panel containing topics in alphabetical order ('climate change' is the first, with text underneath each one). What would be the top three if these were to be ordered by importance?

- Content: The inspiration page shows five people. Are all these people relevant? Who else would you include?
- Design: A theme switcher is in the footer on all pages (pink (multicolour), blue, green, orange). Which of these themes should be the default when the site first loads?
- Content/design: Do you have any other suggestions for improving the website's content or design?

Generally, the response to the website was positive. Comments included:

"I feel the website clearly explains what it needs to, it tells me what being a changemaker is as well as why it's important to do things like what changemakers do. The website informs people what differences could be made through being a changemaker."

"I like the saying 'small actions lead to big change'. It lays out... what the page is about - being a young person and by doing smaller things then it can make a bigger difference for others. However directly underneath it you speak about talking to parliament and the Senedd. I would say these are very big steps and can be quite intimidating. You might want to add some text saying local councils or youth groups, so it seems more manageable."

"The design of the website [is] clean and neat. I like the design and theme throughout the website. The information is at a suitable level, it is not overwhelmingly in-depth so everyone can understand it with no knowledge on the topic."

"I like the theme switcher function. I haven't seen anything like it on any other website."

"I am not a huge fan of [the text] 'join the changemakers', it sounds like a club or an organisation. I might have misunderstood this, but I don't think it's an organisation I am joining, I thought it was to become a changemaker and make change in my local community. You could try 'be the changemaker' or something similar."

"I advocate for a function or spotlight section that showcases individuals across the UK and globally who are actively driving change and making a difference at present. This feature should encompass individuals and projects from diverse demographics, offering a comprehensive view of impactful initiatives."

"Incorporating multimedia resources like short video snippets would greatly enhance the platform's value. Additionally, given its educational focus, implementing a feature that enables users to make notes and highlight passages for future reference would be highly valuable. This functionality would enhance user engagement and facilitate active learning experiences on the platform."

The feedback led to the following changes:

- Changing the opening text on the introduction page to make changemaking less 'intimidating' (so, making it clear that change can be made via means other than UK Parliament and the Welsh Parliament)
- Slight edits to other bits of text, such as changing 'join the changemakers' to 'be a changemaker', to clarify some sections or better explain some concepts
- Rather than narrowing down the number of topics, we stuck with the original twelve, but slightly changed some of them to make them more relevant

- Changing some of the inspirational examples, to make them more relevant (more Welsh examples, more young adult examples)
- Keeping the theme switcher so participants can choose from four colours but making the default colour pink.

Stage 3 – the final website

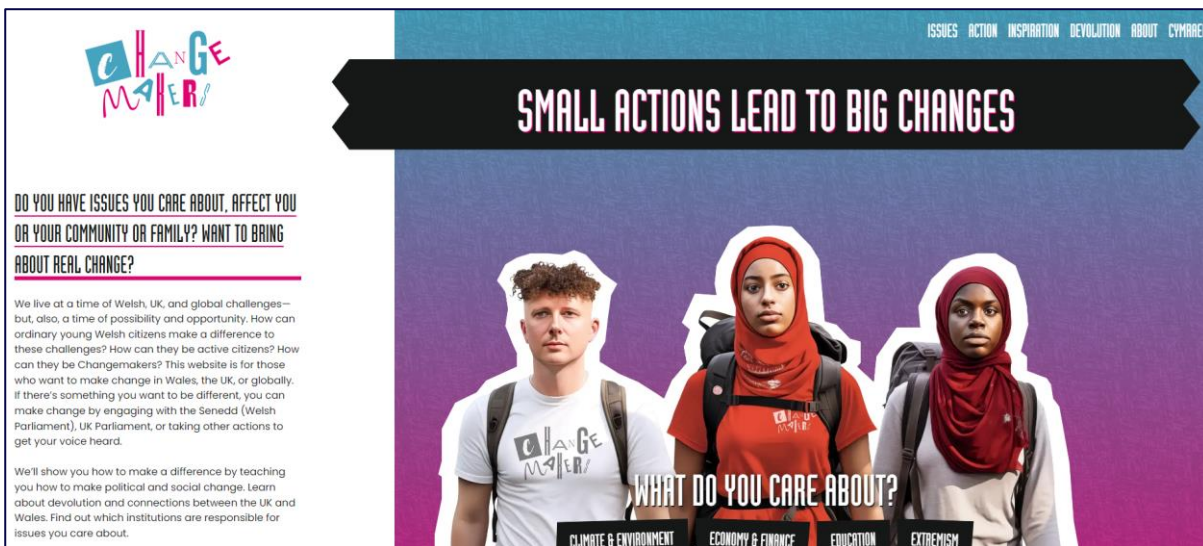
The final website can be access at the below URLs:

<https://changemakers.wales/en/> [the English language version]

<https://changemakers.wales/cy/> [the Welsh language version].

Each website includes a ‘toggle’ which allows the user to switch from English to Welsh or Welsh to English, to meet Welsh language standards.

The **front page** of the website includes the website title (‘Changemakers’), introductory text which makes the devolved/national aspect of making change clear (i.e., you can make change locally, in Wales, and the UK), and a strapline stating it’s about small changes leading to big change (to make the concept of making change more accessible). It also lists the twelve key issues under ‘what do you care about’ which can be clicked on to lead through to each individual issue.



The **'issues'** tab also lists each issue with a short amount of introductory text. Clicking through then leads to further information on each issue.



For example, **'climate and environment'** contains more information about what others are doing and what individuals can do (including, out of screenshot, links to other relevant websites), as well as a 'who's responsible' section outlining with a pink tick which institution (local councils, Welsh Parliament, or UK Parliament) is responsible – users can then click on the relevant answer to get more information. They can also click on 'be a changemaker' which gives them suggestion of how they can try and make change (such as create a petition).



ISSUES ACTION INSPIRATION DEVOLUTION ABOUT CYMAREG

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

Environmental awareness among young people is vital for preserving the Earth. By advocating for sustainable practices and policies, young people can contribute to a healthier planet for current and future generations. By taking action, young people can contribute to sustainable solutions, advocate for renewable energy, and push for policies that mitigate environmental degradation.

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE

- Local Councils ✓
- Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament ✓
- UK
Parliament ✓

BE A CHANGEMAKER

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

Wales is legally committed (through the Environment (Wales) Act 2016) to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 with 10-yearly targets and 5-yearly carbon budgets setting out a pathway to net zero and a plan of Net Zero Wales. The COP15 global biodiversity framework was agreed in December 2022, with an overarching target to protect 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas by 2030. The Welsh Government has committed to meeting this target through statutory domestic biodiversity targets. It has committed to updating Climate Change policy, and raising the profile of environment, energy, planning, and transport in Wales, as well as how these interconnect with international aims. The Senedd has set up the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee to hold the Welsh Government to account on this.

BE A CHANGEMAKER

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Local councils, the Senedd and UK Parliament are all responsible for issues relating to the environment in different ways. If you are concerned about a local issue, e.g. an overflowing river, or parkland which is being fly-tipped, contact the local council first. If you want to campaign on a devolved issue, such as pollution or eco-system loss, contact one of your local Members of the Senedd. To lobby for a wider environment issue that involves other countries in the UK, focus on the UK Parliament. Environmental incidents can be reported through Natural Resources Wales.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

ECONOMY & FINANCE

EDUCATION

EXTREMISM

GENDER EQUALITY

GLOBAL ISSUES

LGBTQI+ EQUALITY

MIGRATION

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

RACIAL EQUALITY

SOCIAL JUSTICE

MARCUS RASHFORD

FOOTBALLER AND CAMPAIGNER

Marcus's highest profile impact was influencing the UK Government to extend free school meals for children. He also raised the profile of the issue in the media and public leading to a national conversation about food poverty.



The **'action'** tab gives information on how to take action to make change both through political institutions and outside of them. Each section can be clicked on to get more information and examples. Users can, if they wish, head straight to this section if they don't have a specific issue or they want to find out more general information.

How to take action

Arts and music

You can raise awareness through art and craft, using visual creations to promote a political or social cause. Social injustices and political causes can be highlighted through musical performance and lyrics.

Broadcasting

Blogging and YouTube videos have emerged as potent tools for influencing political change by democratising access to information, facilitating public discourse, and mobilising communities. Both blogging and YouTube videos empower individuals to participate actively in political discourse, mobilise support for social movements, and challenge established power structures.

Create a petition

If you feel strongly about an issue you may want to start or sign a petition, on either the UK Parliament website or Senedd website. You can also create non-



Peaceful protest

Peaceful demonstrations are legal under UK law and you can attempt to achieve change through non-violent and legal demonstrations.

Political parties

Most political parties have youth sections which deal with issues most relevant to young people.

Register to vote

Voting is the act of choosing something or someone in an organised election. You can register to vote from age 14 in Wales and Scotland (and 16 in the rest of the UK), which means you will be ready to participate in local and general elections.

Contact elected representatives

Your member of UK Parliament

Most MPs hold regular sessions called surgeries where they meet constituents to talk about issues of concern face-to-face or online. MPs can also request time for debates on local, national, and international issues. You can also ask MPs (and Lords) to support your campaign by asking them to submit written questions to government departments and ask questions in the House of Commons.

members.parliament.uk/members/commons

House of Lords

The House of Lords provides a second opinion to the House of Commons and the Government. The main role of the House of Lords is debating, amending, and making laws, checking and challenging the Government, and investigating public policy. You can contact any member of the Lords or search for the areas they're interested in.

members.parliament.uk/members/lords

Your Member of the Senedd

Welsh residents are represented by one Member of the Senedd representing their local area and four more representing their region. Senedd Members hold regular surgeries and can raise issues. They can be contacted by email, letter, phone, and social media. Members can ask a question to a Minister—including the First Minister—during meetings of the Senedd and scrutiny sessions. They can also ask written questions, make points during debate, raise issues in committee meetings, or write directly to decision makers.

senedd.wales/find-a-member-of-the-senedd

Local councils

The issue you want to change may be best dealt with at a local level, through working with your local elected councillors. Councillors represent their local community, develop and review council policy, and scrutinise decisions.

gov.uk/find-local-council

All/cross-Party groups

In the UK Parliament, All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal, cross-party groups formed by MPs and members of the House of Lords who share a common interest. While they're not official parliamentary committees, these groups can sometimes be influential because of their non-party political approach to issues. If the focus of an group aligns with your campaign, you could approach members to ask them for support. Senedd members can set up cross-party groups which are a great way for interest groups

Select committees


In the UK Parliament, Select Committees inquire into issues affecting government and the public. They often use online surveys and requests for evidence. Senedd Committees do a similar role and examine proposed legislation and scrutinise the expenditure and policies of the Welsh Government.

committees.parliament.uk/inquiries

The **'inspiration'** tab lists four examples – two famous, two ordinary young Welsh citizens. Each one can be clicked on to get more information, outlining what they did, whether they were successful and any challenges.

GET INSPIRED TO MAKE CHANGE

ANGEL EZEADUM
YOUTH PARLIAMENT MEMBER FOR RACE COUNCIL CYMRU




First Member of the Welsh Youth Parliament representing Race Council Cymru. Angel made impactful contributions to call for Black and People of Colour's histories to be part of Wales's school curriculum.

WE NEED INFORMATION DIRECTLY TO US RATHER THAN US BEING CAST ASIDE OR IT BEING FILTERED.

BROADCASTING CREATE & PETITION LOBBYING

MARCUS RASHFORD
FOOTBALLER AND CAMPAIGNER




Marcus's highest profile impact was influencing the UK Government to extend free school meals for children. He also raised the profile of the issue in the media and public leading to a national conversation about food poverty.

DREAM BIG AND WORK HARDER THAN ANYONE ELSE TO ACHIEVE IT.

BROADCASTING LOBBYING

POPPY STOWELL-EVANS
YOUTH CLIMATE AMBASSADOR FOR WALES



Poppy is a strong advocate for equality, social justice and human rights. She's a passionate climate change activist and considers herself as an internationalist, believing countries should work together.

MY ACTIVISM IS LARGELY DOWN TO MY MUM AND NAN AND LEARNING ABOUT WOMEN WHO PAVED THE WAY.

BROADCASTING LOBBYING WRITE AND PUBLISH

The **'devolution'** tab explains how politics in Wales works and which institution does what.

DEVOLUTION

House of Commons


The House of Commons is the elected part of the United Kingdom Parliament. Ministers are the members who are in the Government. Political parties not in government are called the opposition. The Speaker is an MP who has been elected by other MPs to act as Chair during debates.

hcenquiries@parliament.uk
0800 112 4272 (Freephone) or 020 7219 4272
House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

HOUSE OF LORDS

The House of Lords provides a second opinion to the House of Commons and the Government. The main role of the House of Lords is debating, amending, and making laws, checking and challenging the Government, and investigating public policy.

WHO DOES WHAT?

 Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

The Senedd (Welsh Parliament) makes laws for and about Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account. The Welsh Government makes policy and proposes laws about devolved issues and proposes the annual budget for each area it's responsible for. All powers are devolved to Wales, apart for those that are explicitly reserved to the UK Parliament. The key areas devolved to Wales are:

AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, & FISHING

EDUCATION


HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

HOUSING

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

THE WELSH LANGUAGE

 UK Parliament

The UK Parliament and government have similar roles to the Senedd, but for the United Kingdom as a whole except on devolved matters. The Senedd cannot change laws on matters under UK Parliament control, however, the UK Parliament can create laws relating to Wales, although it's not supposed to without the consent of Senedd.

ABORTION

ALCOHOL SALE & SUPPLY

BROADCASTING

CHILD MAINTENANCE, PENSIONS, & SOCIAL SECURITY

CRIME & POLICING

DEFENCE

DOCTORS AND DENTISTS REGULATION

EMPLOYMENT & INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

ENERGY

ENGLISH AND WELSH LEGAL SYSTEM

FOREIGN AFFAIRS & THE EU

GAMBLING AND LICENSING

There is also an **'about'** tab which explains the origins of the project, and the **'Cymraeg'** tab which changes the English text to Welsh (and vice versa, on the Welsh language version of the website).

Stage 4 – next steps

It's important to recognise that the website we have created is not an endpoint. Indeed, the young people that participated in our research made other suggestions that we can build into this website or act on in a subsequent project stage.

Suggestions include:

- On the website:
 - More interactivity, such as quizzes/tests of learning and note taking/highlighting facilities
 - A game element, e.g., a game which tests a person's changemaking skills and the decisions that have to be made to get a positive result
 - An 'AI element', e.g., interacting with a chatbot to ask questions, or using it to review/give feedback on a person's answers
 - Introduce videos (such as inspirational changemakers talking about how they made change)
 - More case studies
 - Create a glossary/highlight key words
- Outside of the website:
 - More focus on social and political change in schools to increase awareness and understanding, including opportunities for discussion and debate
 - Provision of accessibility education resources across the educational pipeline

- Using social media platforms to increase awareness (including use of humorous memes).

“Schools should be teaching more progressive politics. And more about policy in general. The fact I would have got through most of high school without clearly understanding the key differences between Labour and the Conservatives if it wasn't for my own research, is appalling”.

“It would be cool to have educational resources on political and social change – I'd definitely read that! Make sure that it's in a dyslexia friendly format and compatible with screen readers please”.

“I think more people need to be taught to speak up for things when they are in secondary school in a way such as introducing politics or something as a lesson”.

“Maybe use social media platforms to make people more aware, or use lectures to help raise awareness, or posters”.

Conclusions, recommendations and next steps

The 'Changemakers' research project explores improving young people's (aged 16-24) understanding of making political and social change, using Wales as a case study, developing educational resource(s) to improve understanding, engendering active citizenship. It also seeks to help policymakers, educators and youth organisations to learn about cost-effective ways to increase understanding of and participation in politics of young people, enabling more representative decision-making.

To do this, we have initially focused on Wales and young Welsh people, using a variety of research methods, such as online surveys and focus groups, to capture how young people feel about UK political institutions and their understanding of making political and social change, and the type of resource(s) they need to improve their understanding/engagement.

Changemakers aims

'Changemakers' will generate robust educational resource(s) that enable young people (16-24) to become active citizens by improving their understanding of how to make political and social change in the UK

This will be achieved through the development of educational resource(s) post-secondary/compulsory education

The research will initially focus on Wales, working with young Welsh citizens and OU Wales.

Changemakers outcomes

To enable young people (16-24) to better understand how to make political and social change in the UK as 'active citizens'

To positively impact political participation in later adulthood via the upskilling and engagement engendered

To help policy makers and educators learn cost-effective ways to increase understanding of, and participation in, politics of young people. Further benefitting societal cohesion, civic engagement, and enabling more representative decision-making

To influence the development of young people's citizenship information and political education post-secondary/compulsory education.

Changemakers key conclusions and recommendations

The key findings from our research so far are as follows:

- Young people in the UK are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy and less likely to participate in formal politics, such as voting and joining a political party – although they may participate in *other* forms of political life.

This suggests a focus on formal politics/political engagement is important for researchers/organisations working in this area

- A barrier to participation and understanding is 'information gaps', which vary according to the quality of political education received at school. As exposure to citizenship education has an impact on engaged citizenship, **all UK curriculums, including the Welsh curriculum, would benefit from a more specific focus on political education and active citizenship/political action**

- The focus is often on citizenship education in schools (particularly secondary), but post-secondary/compulsory education is also important. Citizenship education therefore not only needs to be embedded across the school curriculum; **it also needs to be extended to adults/the general public as part of a public information strategy**
- Research into young people’s perceptions of political concerns in Wales suggest that these do connect with localised issues, and are also influenced by perceptions of meaningful representation, which in turn influences participation. However, many young people are unsure about how the various strata of local, national, and UK-wide government agencies differ/impact their daily lives and who and what should be responsible for tackling political concerns. These ideas may not just be formulated upon knowledge of where power lies, but socio-historical and cultural constructions around this, and how individual political concerns are understood and felt at a localised, geographical level. **As such, it is essential that citizenship education, whether in school or post-school, includes this important context**
- Many Welsh young people felt more confident about their ability to influence political change through the Welsh Parliament, as opposed to the UK Parliament. However, many Welsh young people were less confident in their understanding of how to make political and social change through the Welsh Parliament compared to the UK Parliament. Despite feeling more confident that they can influence change in Wales, the research suggest that many young people lack knowledge about the tools to impact change. Barriers can be logistics focused – not knowing who or where to contact. **As such, as well**

as the need to increase understanding generally, there may be a particular need to increase understanding of the role and workings of devolved parliaments

- The research revealed the significance of social media when learning about making social and political change. Many young people feel an online tool is the most engaging medium for them to learn how to engage politically.

Online educational resources should include socio-historical and socio-political context, introducing the multi-layered connections between UK nations, and deciphering the complexities of individual political institutions, focusing on political and social change

- **What is clear is the need for more clarity to both enable future generations to receive grounding in political education that supports their future decision-making and engagement, and further research to establish a clear sense of what drives the reluctance to consistently engage.**

Alongside moves toward engagement is a need for a clearer sense of what comprises daily politics for Welsh young people, and the disconnect between the experiences of everyday life and formal politics.

Changemakers next steps

Changemakers is an ongoing research project. The website we have developed is not a final product. We know from our research that it can be developed further, and we can also develop other complementary resources, as identified by the young people we worked with.

We want to extend the research to cover the four nations of the UK (Wales plus England, Scotland and Northern Ireland), exploring the opinions and experiences

of 16–24 year olds across the UK. We then want to develop the website so that young people from each nation can use it, based on where they live and in relation to the political institutions that govern them. While we have worked with young people throughout the research process, there is more to do. Namely, we now want to assess the *impact* of the website on the understanding of young Welsh people aged 16–24 through a final set of focus groups, working with the same youth organisations we worked with to develop the website, thus contributing to the following key outcomes: ‘1. To enable young people to better understand how to make political and social change in the UK as ‘active citizens’ and ‘2. To positively impact political participation in later adulthood via the upskilling and engagement engendered’.

We also plan, as part of this project’s dissemination and impact strategy, to address the remaining key outcomes, ‘3. To help policy makers and educators learn cost-effective ways to increase understanding of, and participation in, politics of young people. Further benefitting societal cohesion, civic engagement, and enabling more representative decision-making’ and ‘4. To influence the development of young people’s citizenship information and political education post-secondary/compulsory education.’ The publication of this final report will therefore be accompanied by outreach events with young people and youth organisations to both publicise the website and useful actions they can take as individuals and organisations. Alongside this, we will also disseminate key findings to policymakers in the Welsh and UK Parliaments (and other parliaments/assemblies as appropriate) in the areas of citizenship education across the educational pipeline – including adult citizenship education/information – and democratic engagement.

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Appendix: survey questions

- Do you think it is possible for ordinary people to make real-life political or social change through the UK Parliament? [yes/no/not sure]
- Do you think it is possible for ordinary people to make real-life political or social change through the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)? [yes/no/not sure]
- Do you understand what 'active citizenship' means? [yes/no/not sure]
- If you answered 'no' or 'not sure', please read this definition of active citizenship: "Active citizenship is the idea that someone can be an active political citizen; they can actively try and make change." Do you now understand what is meant by 'active citizenship'? [yes/no/not sure]
- How confident are you in understanding how to make political and social change through the UK Parliament? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not confident and 5 is very confident: 1 (not confident), 2 (slightly confident), 3 (somewhat confident), 4 (fairly confident), 5 (very confident)]
- If you selected 1 or 2, why are you not confident? Select the ones that apply [I don't understand how the UK Parliament works (i.e., how it makes law), I don't understand what issues/areas/laws the UK Parliament covers, I don't know who/where to contact, Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- How confident are you in understanding how to make political and social change through the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not confident and 5 is very confident: 1 (not confident), 2 (slightly confident), 3 (somewhat confident), 4 (fairly confident), 5 (very confident)]
- If you selected 1 or 2, why are you not confident? Select the ones that apply [I don't understand how the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) works (i.e., how it makes law), I don't understand what issues/areas/laws the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) covers, I don't know who/where to contact, Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- You can also try and make change outside of formal parliamentary engagement/processes, such as by campaigning locally, raising awareness on social media, or creating a petition.

How confident are you in understanding how to make political and social change in this way? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not confident and 5 is very confident: 1 (not confident), 2 (slightly confident), 3 (somewhat confident), 4 (fairly confident), 5 (very confident)]

- Did you learn about how to make political and social change at secondary school? [yes/no/not sure]
- If you answered 'yes', how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change through the UK Parliament? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful: 1 (not useful), 2 (slightly useful), 3 (somewhat useful), 4 (fairly useful), 5 (very useful)]
- If you answered 'yes', how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change through the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful: 1 (not useful), 2 (slightly useful), 3 (somewhat useful), 4 (fairly useful), 5 (very useful)]
- If you answered 'yes', how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change outside of the UK Parliament / Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)? (e.g., through a local campaign or social media?) [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful: 1 (not useful), 2 (slightly useful), 3 (somewhat useful), 4 (fairly useful), 5 (very useful)]
- You may have learnt about how to make political and social change in other ways. Select the ones that apply [From family, From friends, From an employer/trainer, From political or campaigning organisations, From traditional media (newspapers/television), From social media, From further education (e.g., college/sixth form), From higher education (e.g. university), Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- If you selected 'social media', which forms of social media? Select the ones that apply [Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- If you selected 'social media', how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change through the UK Parliament? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not

useful and 5 is very useful: 1 (not useful), 2 (slightly useful), 3 (somewhat useful), 4 (fairly useful), 5 (very useful)]

- If you selected 'social media', how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change through the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)? [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful: 1 (not useful), 2 (slightly useful), 3 (somewhat useful), 4 (fairly useful), 5 (very useful)]
- If you selected 'social media', how useful did you find it in relation to understanding how to make political and social change outside of the UK Parliament / Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)? (e.g., through a local campaign or social media?) [scale of 1-5, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful: 1 (not useful), 2 (slightly useful), 3 (somewhat useful), 4 (fairly useful), 5 (very useful)]
- Have you ever engaged with the UK Parliament when trying to make political or social change? (e.g., by writing to your Member of Parliament or creating or signing a parliamentary petition) [yes/no/not sure]
- If you answered 'yes', what did you do? Select the ones that apply [Contacted a Member of Parliament, Contacted a member of the Lords, Submitted evidence to a Select Committee, Approached an All-Party Parliamentary Group, Created a petition, Signed a petition, Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- If you answered 'yes', did you meet your aim? [yes/no/not sure]
- Have you ever engaged with the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) when trying to make political or social change? (e.g., by writing to your Member of Senedd or creating or signing a parliamentary petition) [yes/no/not sure]
- If you answered yes, what did you do? Select the ones that apply [Contacted a Member of Senedd, Submitted evidence to a committee, Approached a Cross-party Group, Created a petition, Signed a petition, Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- If you answered 'yes', did you meet your aim? [yes/no/not sure]
- Have you ever tried to make political and social change outside of the UK Parliament / Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) (e.g., by campaigning locally, raising awareness on social media, or creating a petition)? [yes/no/not sure]

- If you answered 'yes', what did you do? Select the ones that apply [Contacted/lobbied a local council, Raised awareness through art/music, Took part in media activism (including social media), Wrote/published something to raise awareness/campaign, Lobbied someone with influence, Took part in economic activism (i.e., boycotted a company), Took part in peaceful protest/demonstration, Did something in the local community, Created/signed a non-parliamentary petition (e.g., 38 Degrees, Change.Org), Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- What qualities does someone aiming to make political or social change need? Pick your top five (we have provided some definitions to help your understanding). Please select no more than 5 answer(s): [Emotional awareness and empathy (placing yourself in the position of others), Optimism (staying positive), Realism (being realistic, understanding what is achievable), Listening skills (listening to others/their opinions), Communication skills (communicating in appropriate ways), Assertiveness (standing up for yourself), Strategic mind (identifying long term goals/how to achieve them), Focus (having clear outcomes in mind, not getting distracted), Resilience (if you face a setback, re-focus and re-strategise), Self-motivation (the ability to drive yourself to take action), Organisation (good planning and record keeping), Flexibility (an openness to change), Ability to work with others, Creativity (being imaginative when campaigning)]
- What format(s) would you find most useful for learning about how to make political and social change? Select the ones that apply [An online course, An online booklet/leaflet/text, A printed/hard copy booklet/leaflet/text, A video resource, An audio resource (like a podcast), A website with a repository of information, A graphic novel/resource, A social media feed/campaign, Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- Which design elements are important? Select the ones that apply [The language is easy to understand, It can be read/completed quickly, It is well-designed (in terms of style/layout), It is interactive (e.g., quizzes and tasks to complete), It covers a range of learning modes (for example, visual, auditory, and interactive), It includes inclusive/diverse examples/case studies/images, It is available online, It is printed/can be printed, It is available in/adapted to a range of formats (e.g., phone, computer, tablet), Other]

- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- What content elements are important? Select the ones that apply [Explanations of how political institutions work (e.g., UK Parliament / Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) processes), Explanations of issues/areas/laws each Parliament covers (e.g., the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) makes laws in specific devolved/policy areas, and the UK Parliament makes laws in other areas), Explanations of who to contact / where to contact (e.g., contact your Member of UK Parliament about these issues, and your Member of the Senedd about those issues), Guidance on how to make change through parliamentary engagement (e.g., such as engaging with select committees or getting a question raised by an elected representative), Guidance on how to try and make change outside of formal parliamentary engagement (e.g., such as by campaigning locally, raising awareness on social media, or creating a petition), Qualities needed to make change (e.g., how to work with others), Link to further resources/information (e.g., to each Parliament's educational resources), Other]
- If you selected 'Other', please give more detail [free text box]
- How quickly should you be able to read/watch/engage with the resource? [Under 5 minutes, 5–10 minutes, 10–20 minutes, 20–30 minutes, 30–60 minutes, 1–2 hours, Over 2 hours]

Notes:

- Survey respondents were also asked a range of consent and demographic questions, the latter of which we will explore in more detail in subsequent academic publications
- The external marketing survey asked broadly the same questions but occasionally with slight wording changes or in a different order, to suit the survey format utilised/the survey team. The external marketing survey also did not ask the design questions due to the timing of the survey in relation to the educational resource design/build.

