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Electoral  
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  Our Voices  
  Heard

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# Our Voices Heard

## Young people's ideas for political education in Wales

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# Contents

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<b>3</b>	Introduction
<b>5</b>	A young person's voice
<b>6</b>	Recommendations

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# Introduction



Jess Blair,  
Director ERS Cymru

If you're a young person living in Wales in 2018 your political landscape has fundamentally shifted in the past few years. In the context of Brexit, Trump and fake news, young people have more at stake than ever with such events having a direct impact on their futures.

In Wales, this seismic political time comes alongside moves to extend the right to vote in Assembly and local government elections to 16 and 17 year olds. Next year will see legislation tabled to make this happen, with the first 16 year olds to vote likely doing so in the next Assembly elections in 2021.

In this context there has never been a better time to reconsider the place of democracy in education. We have here an opportunity- an opportunity to make young people active citizens and equip them with far more political expertise than the rest of us ever had when first beginning to vote. The fact that young people are essentially a captive audience, with the majority of them at school, gives us a direct route with which to engage, educate and empower the very people that embody the future of Wales.

Over the last few months, 'Our Voices Heard' has spoken with nearly 200 young people about politics, political education and democracy. We believe these young people represent a wider call for change. The 'our' in 'Our Voices Heard' is simple- it's for the young people we've been speaking to. This is their opportunity to have a say, to impact on decisions that affect their lives.

Our sessions with young people in 11 schools across Wales have been co-produced. That means we've asked them for their ideas and recommendations on how to improve political education in Wales. Each class then voted for their top recommendations, which were taken to a panel of people working in education, politics, teachers and young people to be

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refined and prepared for formally handing to Welsh Government.

What the young people we've spoken to have told us is that there is a current lack of political education in schools. Most we spoke to had received very little, if any at all. Yet, despite this there was a desire to know more. More about the way decisions are made, about how to campaign and influence those decisions, and how things in Wales actually work. There were overwhelming calls in nearly all of the schools too for better financial education to go alongside information about democracy, as well as demands for more practical experiences of politics. Ideas that we saw repeatedly come up were around the need for a national mock election where people under the voting age could 'practice' voting at the same time as adults.

At the moment, for most people politics is just this thing that happens over there. We need to bridge the gap between people and politics and showing people the personal side of politics is the way to start building that bridge. Whether it's politicians coming into schools to take part in a 'question time' style event, or schools being offered a chance to tour political institutions, showing people the practical side of democracy can only complement what they can learn in a classroom.

The ideas that we present for 'Our Voices Heard' are therefore directly from and for young people. They are a call for change, so that generations to come can be better equipped than we are to deal with and be part of a changing and challenged democracy. We hope their voices can be fully heard.

**Jess Blair**  
**Director, ERS Cymru**

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# A young person's voice



**Madison Phipps Magill,**  
**Bedwas High School**

Wales is moving forward with its Youth Parliament and the introduction of Votes at 16, yet we still find that young people are not receiving education on politics which enables them to make an informed decision and choice. Therefore it is important for political education to be included in the education curriculum.

I am interested in politics and believe that children and young people should be empowered to engage in politics and understand the decision making process, who the political parties are and what's in their manifestos.

For me the recommendation around introducing politics in school on a weekly basis primarily in PSE and Welsh Baccalaureate is key. I really like it, however, it needs to be age appropriate to the students who are receiving the information and needs to start in year 6.

I hope Welsh Government take notice of what we are saying. If I could ask one question of the Education Secretary it would be how is she going to prioritise political education in Wales and how much progress needs to be made for this to be implemented.

**Madison Phipps Magill, 14,**  
**Participant in the 'Our Voices Heard' project**

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# Recommendations

- Statutory political education lessons with a minimum expectation of one hour each fortnight with learning focused on;
  - Parties
  - Democracy
  - Institutions
  - Campaigning (to include practical sessions where young people can run a campaign from beginning to end on an issue they care about)
- An independent toolbox for teachers to adapt and apply for political lessons to ensure they are comprehensive and engaging and to ensure they are delivered in a non-partisan way
- Space for discussing and debating current events to be inbuilt in form time, political education classes and PSE lessons.
- A national mock election for young people which should be held at the same time as Assembly elections.

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- An online resource at election time for people to find out about candidates standing in their area and to be able to submit questions to them. This should be in plain English/Welsh integrating with social media.
  - ‘Life lessons’ to feature as part of PSE lessons, including stronger financial education around things like taxes, registering to vote and paying bills.
  - Better support for schools to be able to host a range of politicians, including a resource to be developed for schools to facilitate a ‘question time’ style event with politicians and an adaptation of Parliament’s ‘Skype the Speaker’ programme, where schools can call their local politicians. Schools should ensure that students are exposed to a range of views.



