

CEWC-Cymru

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote innovative ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local and community groups as well as national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about CEWC-Cymru's Your Say project, funded by the New Initiatives Fund. The report highlights the aims and objectives of the project, the achievements and lessons learnt by CEWC-Cymru.

The grant

CEWC-Cymru is an educational charity working with young people to promote understanding of the contemporary world. It provides support for local, national and global citizenship education in Wales.

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £14,735 to CEWC-Cymru for the Your Say project and an amount of **£14,735** was paid out. This project intended to make democratic participation an everyday element of young people's lives and to entrench a general awareness of the importance of voting. The project ran for 10 months, from May 2003 to March 2004.

The Commission's grant contributed towards the costs of employing a Schools Democracy Officer for 10 months, the hosting of regional conferences, translation costs and the establishment of a section on the CEWC-Cymru website for the resources developed during the project.

Aims and objectives

The objectives of the project were:

- to promote the active use of democracy in Welsh secondary schools;
- to increase links between schools and Assembly Members;
- to encourage young people aged 11–18 to value democracy, to understand the role that their opinions can have in shaping society and to view elections as a vital component of a democratic society; and
- to disseminate information about both good and bad practice in the promotion of democracy in schools.

Target outcomes

The target long-term outcome is to increase young people's awareness and involvement in the democratic process within Wales.

Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by project manager, Diana Strasser, Schools Democracy Officer for CEWC-Cymru, as outlined below:

- A written questionnaire was completed by school council members to assess how

students valued democracy and utilised it in every-day school activities. A control group from a non-participating school was also asked to participate in the same questionnaire.

- Written reports were provided by each school that took part, detailing links that were established with Assembly Members.
- Focus groups were held at the end of each regional conference to gather participating students' views.
- A feedback form was established on CEWC-Cymru's website in conjunction with the new teacher resource section.

Deliverables

- approximately 400 students participated;
- 38 schools and colleges participated;
- 11 Assembly Members participated;
- four youth conferences were delivered;
- six school visits were conducted which developed links between schools and their Assembly Members;
- five Swansea schools and 35 students participated in the school council activity day;
- 13 guidance papers were produced for teachers on the website;
- a CD-Rom was produced for teachers providing guidance on how to set up school councils and promote

awareness among students; and

- seven teacher conferences were attended by Diana Strasser to disseminate resources to teachers.

The delivery of the project was split into four phases:

Phase 1 (May to June 2003)

Diane Strasser contacted Assembly Members to encourage participation and secure the involvement of the four pilot secondary schools listed below. Students' understanding of democracy and elections was assessed through a series of questionnaires, observations of school council meetings and interviews with teachers.

- Monmouth Comprehensive School;
- Ysgol Eifionydd;
- Gowerton Comprehensive School; and
- Llandrindod High School.

Phase 2 (July to August 2003)

Youth conferences on democracy were held at four locations across Wales with 35 secondary schools and colleges taking part. Morning sessions included workshops that were aimed at enhancing students' understanding of democracy, followed by panel discussions with Assembly Members. The conferences were held at:

- The University of Wales Swansea;
- Monmouth Leisure Centre;

- The Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells; and
- Coleg Harlech, Gwynedd.

Phase 3 (September to November 2003)

Half-day sessions between students and Assembly Members were held at six schools across Wales. The original four pilot schools participated as well as two additional schools, which were Bedwas High School and the Bishop of Llandaff High School.

Phase 4 (December to March 2004)

A school council activity day was arranged in Cardiff, attended by five Swansea schools. School council members took part in workshops about the Assembly and electoral systems, followed by a trip to the Assembly and a question-and-answer session with an Assembly Member, Peter Black.

The bilingual guidance materials for teachers were also launched on CEWC-Cymru's website. These included lesson plans, factsheets, worksheets and suggestions about how to encourage student engagement in the democratic process.

Project and resource management

The activities of the project were supervised by Martin Pollard, the CEWC-Cymru Education Officer, and carried out by Diana Strasser, Schools Democracy Officer.

Records of budgeted and actual income and expenditure were maintained and monitored at CEWC-Cymru's offices. The grant monies were allocated as follows:

- recruitment and employment of the Schools Democracy Officer: **£8,813**;
- regional conference costs: **£2,167**;
- website cost: **£1,488**;
- translation, production and distribution of advisory guide: **£973**; and
- other expenses: **£1,294**.

Total: **£14,735**.

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

Survey results at the beginning of the project demonstrated that many students did not know who their Assembly Members were. Nor did they have a full understanding of terms such as 'first past the post,' 'referendum' or 'proportional representation.'

The survey carried out at the end of the project demonstrated that the workshops did much to raise students' awareness about democracy and highlighted that students were more interested in politics as a result of the project. Because pupils were given the opportunity to practise democratic decision-making in their classrooms they were able to gain an appreciation for the benefits of democracy.

Valuable links were also made between the schools involved and their Assembly Members during both the regional conferences and the school visits. Feedback from the conferences demonstrated that many students felt these events could improve the relationship between young people and politicians.

The concurrent survey with the control school did not produce enough results to draw accurate comparisons between the two groups. This would have been valuable information and should be examined further to determine how it can be conducted more successfully next time.

Results of the project have been published on CEWC-Cymru's website. This is especially helpful for teachers who are interested in rolling out similar projects at their own schools. The demand for this resource has been fairly high as there have been 15–20 requests for further information that have come through the CEWC-Cymru website already.

Longer-term impact and ongoing evaluation

The long-term impact of the Your Say project is potentially sizeable. Already 400 students have been impacted, and if the project is rolled out to other schools across Wales many more students will benefit.

Additionally, those students who participated this year could well deepen their knowledge of electoral and democratic processes and become more engaged as they reach voting

age, if they continue to maintain the levels of interest seen during the lifespan of this project. Having direct access to Assembly Members will be important to the continued success of Your Say as they play a significant role in decreasing young people's disenchantment towards politics by listening to their opinions. This was particularly evident at the Harlech conference where three Assembly Members offered to participate in the conference, but none were able to attend in the end, and the students were negatively impacted as a result. Without Assembly Member support, the longer-term impact of this project would be seriously undermined.

Guidance for teachers has been placed on the CEWC-Cymru website and on a CD-Rom, which has been made available to all schools. These resources provide detailed recommendations about how to set up school councils and how to get students engaged with democratic processes. Already 14 separate schools have paid for the CD-Rom and Pembrokeshire County Council has indicated that it is considering purchasing a copy for each of its 50 schools.

If schools take advantage of these facilities, and Assembly Members continue to get involved with their local schools, the longer-term benefits of the project could be significant. Although there is no funding in place for a roll out of the programme, CEWC-Cymru

staff are working with schools on an ad hoc basis to develop links between schools and Assembly Members, and provide help in establishing school councils.

Conclusions

Feedback from students, teachers and Assembly Members has been extremely positive. Additionally, results from the evaluation questionnaires demonstrated that students increased their knowledge of political and democratic processes.

The workshop and conference format proved successful in creating an environment where pupils and Assembly Members could actively engage with each other. Utilising school councils to develop conference and workshop content, and encouraging school council members to lead proceedings also ensured the relevance of discussion topics.

The four primary objectives of the Your Say project as set out in CEWC-Cymru's application have been achieved in the short term. The long-term impact of this project will depend on the successful roll out of the teacher resource packs and the replication of the project in more Welsh schools in future years.

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to

identify several elements of good practice and 'lessons learnt' that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- Developing resources in both CD-Rom and website formats provides increased accessibility.
- Encouraging students to lead in developing conference and workshop content encourages increased engagement.
- Disseminating information through national teacher forums helps to create a higher profile for a project with limited marketing resources.
- Surveying students at the outset of a project provides baseline data that can be used to measure increases in awareness at the completion of a project.

Lessons learnt

- Targeting a narrow age range of students can improve a project's impact. In this case a wide age range participated and some younger participants felt that discussions were too complex, whilst older students felt some discussions were too limited.

- Assembly Members should be briefed in advance of conferences to ensure they answer student questions at an appropriate level.
- Questionnaires and surveys should ask for quantitative information as well as qualitative information to ensure that comparisons can be made between before and after project data.
- Sufficient data should be captured from control groups to make results meaningful.
- Students and Assembly Members should develop their agenda together, facilitated rather than prescribed by teachers. This ensures that students are as empowered and involved as possible.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Martin Pollard from CEWC-Cymru on 029 2022 8549 or visit their website at: www.cewc-cymru.org.uk

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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