

## **What is your position or specialism on this topic?**

## **How do you think we could improve the way we receive news about politics?**

I'm a Member of the Senedd for South Wales East – I also chair the Senedd Committee that covers Communications. I'll focus my remarks on political communication. My position on this topic is that strengthening the connections between politicians and the people they represent is of paramount importance. That means it should be a two-way process: politicians need to improve the ways they (or we) communicate with constituents, and we also need to find ways of engendering more interest in politics at the same time. It's important for democracy that people feel like they have a stake in the decisions that affect their lives.

The pandemic experience highlighted how little many people understood about devolved politics – by this I mean, decisions made in the Senedd in Wales, and by the Welsh Government. This is true because we in Wales don't have a particularly strong independent media (differently from Scotland), most of the news we consume is focused on Westminster. That means that most newspaper opinion pieces, and broadcast news channels we watch, will often focus on decisions made in Westminster, and will often either ignore or marginalise decisions made in the Senedd.

This meant that, before Covid, lots of people didn't realise that health matters were determined in Wales, not Westminster. That lack of awareness means that something isn't working properly – and I believe that we all need to work together to try to fix it. People often feel disillusioned with politics generally, and politicians – and those of us who really want to make a difference and help people need to find better ways of getting that message across, and listening as well. Strengthening the media landscape in Wales is one piece of a wider jigsaw of changes that need to take place – but it's a really important piece.

Some of the ways in which this situation could be improved include, in my opinion: devolving powers over broadcasting to Wales (so that the Welsh Government would have more control, and Westminster less control over this), investing in a stronger more independent Welsh media, finding ways of supporting more local newspapers and local news websites so that they don't have to rely on "clickbait" to get readers, strengthening political education in schools, and normalising conversations about politics that don't have to be so divisive – it's ok to disagree with someone and still respect their point of view. We're all guilty of seeing things as "one side versus the other" – that isn't how we'll progress or fix anything.

### **What would your critics say about your position?**

There are some people who disagree with the idea of devolving more powers to the Senedd (when I talk about devolving powers, that means the process of transferring powers from the Westminster government, or UK Parliament, to the Welsh Government, or Senedd – that is, it means changing which body makes decisions on a particular topic, and who has the legal responsibility for those areas of law). More than that, some people as a matter of principle just don't like the idea of devolution full-stop. Likewise, there will be some people who disagree with the idea that politics can change things.

## Thinking about your critics and/or alternative positions to yours, how would you respond?

If we talk firstly about the idea that politics can't change things: we have to tackle this assumption. The disillusionment which some people feel about politics generally has also been influenced by the bad behaviour of too many politicians. I understand why that has led some people to think that things will never change. The onus (or responsibility) is on us as politicians to help gain people's trust – but it also can't be healthy for us as a society to be in a position where lots of people don't trust anything that anyone in a position of authority says. That's one of the many reasons why, in my opinion, we need to change and develop the ways in which we receive our news.

Likewise, when it comes to people's opinions about devolution – there is a media narrative that's often put forward (and that is propagated by the current government in Westminster) that devolution is a bad thing. In reality, that isn't true – devolution has been a tremendous success in many ways, and whilst there are definitely things that need to be improved, I will always be in favour of decisions being made as close as possible to the people those decisions will affect. There are numerous reasons why I believe that the Westminster system has let Wales down over decades, even centuries – though a lot of that will be outside of the scope of what we're discussing in this citizens' assembly. But these do affect why it is I think decisions affecting Wales should be made in Wales. We can debate, of course, how those decision-making processes should be improved, but the principle remains the same for me.

## Initial Recommendations

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