

CITIZENS' VOICES, PEOPLE'S NEWS: MAKING THE MEDIA WORK FOR WALES



An IWA report, in partnership
with The Open University in Wales
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We are a think tank and charity, independent of government and political parties.

By bringing together experts from all backgrounds, we conceive ambitious and informed ideas which secure political commitments to improve our democracy, public services and economy.

We provide platforms for debate, opportunities for people to make their voices heard and agenda-setting research. We are funded by our members, income from our events and training sessions, and supported by trusts, foundations and other funding bodies. We are a proud signatory to the Zero Racism Wales pledge, a Living Wage employer and hold NCVO Trusted Charity Mark Level One.

Our vision is to create a Wales where everyone can thrive.

For more information about the IWA, our policy work, and how to join, as either an individual or organisational supporter, contact:

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**MAKING
WALES
BETTER**

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The Citizens' Panel was delivered in association with the following partners:



PREFACE

Speaking to the World Bank Conference in 1997, then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, *“The information revolution is unthinkable without democracy, and true democracy is unimaginable without freedom of information.”*

He went on to argue that *“an educated electorate is a powerful electorate. An informed citizenry is the greatest defender of freedom. An enlightened government is a democratising government.”*

That question of what information citizens have access to, and the extent to which they are empowered critically to interrogate it, runs to the very heart of what our democracy is.

Much to our regret, the very concept of truth has become contested. Over the course of these last few years, the idea that there can be facts on the one hand and ‘alternative facts’ on the other has taken hold of a not insignificant proportion of the global population.

Perhaps through a collective ignorance, or perhaps because we have become desensitised, it seems that verifiable, objective truth can be dismissed as ‘fake news’; that important information about the governance of society can be twisted or hidden; and that today’s world has no need for experts.

We needn’t continue down this dangerous path.

These are big issues: certainly not ones that we can tackle alone. However, we can all act within our own networks and spheres of influence to strengthen and protect our democracy, to empower our citizens, and to spread knowledge and information to all.

And although our democracy is young still, Wales can be at the forefront of this democratisation of information. By working together, we can ensure not only that our citizens have access to information, but also that they can understand it and, crucially, use it.

We will all benefit from that.

This work is urgent, and the responsibility to lead it falls on all of us, from government and media to education providers and think tanks, to representatives and citizens alike.

Our hope is that this project, which has brought our two organisations together in common cause, can serve as a catalyst for the development of a Welsh solution to this global, societal challenge. We stand ready to play our part.

For both The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs, our work in this area reflects our shared commitment to the role we play in the public life of Wales: to empower, engage, and inspire our people, and to be a driver of change for the better.

Please join us in this important task.

Louise Casella

Director, The Open University in Wales

Auriol Miller

Director, Institute of Welsh Affairs

INTRODUCTION

This research was commissioned by The Open University in Wales (OU) and the Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA), who are working together with Welsh citizens to explore how access to, and understanding of, the media, news and information in Wales can be improved, especially in an era of 'fake news'.

We want to understand where people get their news and information from, how much they trust it, and how it makes them think and feel about politics in Wales.

Is the information people read and share correct? Does it encourage people to get involved in politics or put them off? How well does the news help Welsh citizens to understand politics?

We want to understand what measures are needed to improve how the media works in Wales. We have worked closely with citizens to make recommendations that we hope will inform and influence the work being conducted by the Welsh Government and the Senedd in the areas of broadcasting and media regulation, media financial support, educational provision and the strengthening of the Welsh language and culture. The premise behind all the recommendations is that reliable sources of news and information are vital for a flourishing democracy, as they allow people to make informed choices about the issues that matter to them.

The OU and IWA were assisted in the research by The Sortition Foundation who recruited the participants for the Citizens' Panel, ensuring that the selection reflected wider society, and Mutual Gain who helped to design and deliver the work.

In the summer of 2022 a selection of fifteen local citizens from across Wales were recruited to come together to exchange learning with a range of 'expert witnesses', led by independent facilitators. Panel members came together online to discuss, debate and learn together, and then put forward recommendations which have been used to inform this report. The appendix to this report explains this process in greater detail.

The final recommendations made by The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs are the result of expert analysis of the learnings, discussions, deliberations and recommendations of the Citizens' Panel, together with a wider analysis of the current media, cultural and political context in Wales. This report outlines both the recommendations and our analysis.

The Citizens' Panel decided to focus on three broad areas for intervention: Media Regulation, Democracy and Citizenship Education and Recognising Welshness. We have maintained these areas of focus as chapter titles for this report, and to further honour the spirit of the process, we have included the original wording of recommendations made by the Panel as part of our narrative. Recommendations have only been omitted or moved into different sections from those proposed by the Panel where overlap was significant enough to make this the only reasonable option.

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**OUR
RECOMMENDATIONS**

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations address approaches to regulation of the media, the advantages of different sorts of education about politics, and the importance that recognising Welshness plays in creating a distinct and fit-for-purpose media landscape that serves citizens of Wales.

We believe that the strength of these recommendations lies in the very high level of support they received from a very wide range of citizens from across Wales. Our aim was for the Citizens' Panel to closely reflect the demographic makeup of the entire population of Wales. Producing the recommendations was predicated on a process with a very high threshold of agreement, and we have indicated the level of support each recommendation received from the Panel, expressed as a percentage. We can therefore be confident that these recommendations would be popular with a very wide cross section of Wales' population.

We recognise the complexities of legislation in this area, particularly in the space of media regulation, and have therefore decided to focus on areas where we judge that the Welsh Government can produce 'quick wins' to ensure the delivery of significant improvements to Wales' media. We also believe that in placing a high value on public interest journalism and investing in local and national media, Wales can set an example for other nations and regions, and influence the development of citizen-centric media within the UK, Europe and beyond.

We would also emphasise the importance of funding. Market failure lies at the heart of many of the problems identified and discussed by our Citizens' Panel, and without significant investment, Wales' media – and therefore its democracy – will continue to suffer from the weaknesses identified both in this report and by many previous surveys. Effective implementation of these recommendations will require significant resources, but we judge that this investment will be more than worth it in order to ensure the future health of Wales' media and democracy, and political participation.

More detailed commentary and analysis of each of the recommendations follows later in the report: Media Regulation (p18), Democracy and Citizenship education (p22) and 'Recognising Welshness' (p26).

MEDIA REGULATION

- 1** We endorse the creation of a Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales, and recommend further exploration of a broadened remit for this body, that would include monitoring all media sources in Wales, including print
- 2** We further recommend that the Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales should have a representative and diverse membership and should be set up to include a mechanism for consultation with Welsh citizens more widely when creating regulatory policy
- 3** We recommend that the Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales develops a made-for-Wales best practice framework against which news outlets active in Wales could be measured (and given a trust rating akin to the food hygiene ratings issued by the Food Standards Agency), and which journalists (including trainees) could use for training and benchmarking
- 4** We recommend that the Welsh Government should work with the UK Government to improve accountability of Public Service Media organisations (PSMs) to the Senedd, through devolution of specific broadcasting powers, and to create channels through which solutions to the transnational regulatory and non-regulatory issues facing the media in Wales, the UK and the wider world might be further explored

DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

- 5** We recommend that the Welsh Government should take steps to strengthen Democracy and Citizenship education in schools, including more explicit guidance for the teaching of democracy and citizenship (local, national and global), as well as the modern history and politics of Wales, within the Humanities area of learning and experience (AOLE) of Curriculum for Wales
- 6** We further recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure the new GCSE qualifications in History and Social Studies include significant Wales-relevant components on politics and democratic processes
- 7** We recommend that the Welsh Government should create appropriate teacher training pathways, including PGCEs and in-service training to allow for specialisation in Social Studies, including politics

RECOGNISING WELSHNESS

- 8 We endorse the commitment in the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru Co-operation Agreement to 'fund existing and new enterprises to improve Welsh-based journalism to tackle the information deficit' and recommend that further funding be allocated to support new career entrants from a wide range of backgrounds in localities across Wales to access journalistic training, with a specific focus on improving the media coverage of Welsh matters, Welsh-language provision and addressing under-represented groups
- 9 We recommend that the Welsh Government should create a Task and Finish Group to deliver a range of high quality Democracy and Citizenship education resources for both school pupils and adults; these should be co-produced with citizens, disseminated through a wide range of community settings and digital channels, and backed by a well-funded public information campaign aimed at a diverse range of groups

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**'HOW WELL DOES
THE NEWS HELP YOU
UNDERSTAND
POLITICS?'**

'HOW WELL DOES THE NEWS HELP YOU UNDERSTAND POLITICS?'

VIEWS FROM OUR CITIZENS' PANEL

The 15 members of our Citizens' Panel spent 19 hours online together, hearing from experts, discussing the key question and deliberating about what kinds of recommendations they could make to improve the media in Wales.

WHERE DO PEOPLE GET THEIR NEWS?

Unsurprisingly given the aim of the project was to bring together a group of people representative of the whole of Wales, the news sources used by our Citizens' Panel are varied and diverse.

Some Panel members actively sought out political news from a range of sources, including the BBC, Channel 4 News and *The Economist*, but others actively avoided the subject and were only aware of the news through 'glancing at the headlines that pop up on my phone' or short bulletins on commercial radio stations such as Heart.

The widely remarked upon decline of print was reflected in comments made about newspapers which were seen as 'expensive', and news that is both free and easy to access was popular among the group, with the *Telegraph*, *Times* and *Guardian* websites mentioned, along with the *Guardian* app. Those who 'prefer the printed word' opted for 'the *Metro* on the train in the morning', the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*.

Welsh sources of news were mentioned, but not always positively, and not always in a way that suggests they are being actively sought out. Some members of the panel used Radio Cymru to help with learning Welsh, while Welsh language speakers suggested they trusted the station more than others because it quite literally 'talks our language'.

Social media was reported as a popular source of news but was widely thought to be 'a source of other people's opinions' rather than a reliable source of factual information.

HOW MUCH DO THEY TRUST IT?

In general, the Citizens' Panel were fairly confident in their own levels of media literacy, and readily acknowledged that they did not trust everything they read or saw in the media. Some broadcasters were more trusted than others, such as the BBC, ITV and Sky News, while one participant said they 'wouldn't touch [some news channels] with a bargepole!'

Some participants said they thought 'we are all aware we've been lied to by the right wing and tabloid press', while others reported the problem of party political 'bias' with the *Daily Mirror* supporting Labour and the *Times* the Conservatives, leaving readers unable to know whether a given story would be trustworthy.

Trust was seen as a particular problem on social media, with negative opinions expressed about Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, as well as some comments that information on social media could be 'true, an opinion, or outright lies'. Panel members also expressed frustration that fact checking on sites such as Facebook and Twitter was not always easy or straightforward. Some panel members said they would always check with 'trusted' mainstream media sites after seeing information they doubted on social media, but saw 'common sense' – meaning a moderate standard of media literacy – as an issue: 'People see a headline, take it as true, and then tell their mates.'

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT HOW THEY THINK AND FEEL ABOUT POLITICS IN WALES?

Again there were a wide range of views shared about the links between the media and people's views of politics and the democratic process.

Broadly, the Citizens' Panel had a low level of confidence in their own knowledge of politics, particularly at a Wales level. Politics was perceived as a difficult subject, and the media was not seen as particularly helpful in providing appropriate information at a level ordinary people could understand.

A lack of 'evidence' was identified as a problem in political news stories, as was 'fluff' that distracted from or obscured necessary key information. There was also an awareness of concepts like 'echo chambers' on social media that reinforces people's existing biases and often polarises opinions, particularly over binary or 'wedge' issues like Brexit.

Some people expressed concern about the influence of powerful media moguls like Rupert Murdoch, while others' lived experiences of dealing with democratic systems and processes also coloured their views, such as difficulties navigating local authority bureaucracies.

It was widely agreed that there is a disconnect between the politics reported on the news and real issues felt to affect people's lives in their local communities. Sometimes this was felt to manifest as a media focused on politicians as a category of celebrity rather than one which was primarily focused on detailed examination of policies. Some participants felt politicians were 'savvy' in using the media only when it suited their agenda, and that they 'only engage the public at election time'.

Notably, much of the discussion around the link between the news media and concomitant levels of trust in politics was focused at a UK level, with exploration of Welsh and local issues mainly becoming part of the conversation only after the learning phase of the project. Within this discussion, it was widely agreed that decision making at the Senedd is underreported, and that there is a 'dearth' of news at the local level.

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**COMMENTARY
AND ANALYSIS**

MEDIA REGULATION

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** We endorse the creation of a Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales, and recommend further exploration of a broadened remit for this body, that would include monitoring all media sources in Wales, including print
- 2** We further recommend that the Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales should have a representative and diverse membership and should be set up to include a mechanism for consultation with Welsh citizens more widely when creating regulatory policy
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OVERVIEW

The Citizens' Panel was interested in effective media regulation (at a Wales level, but also UK and international), as a way of making sure that ordinary people can trust what they are reading and watching. At the heart of all of the discussion was a strong belief that Wales needs more powers, including the power to regulate its own media, to ensure that the issues that matter to Welsh citizens are front and centre in the media, and to strengthen Welsh language media provision.

Generally there was a feeling that a one size fits all UK approach is inadequate, both in practical terms and in terms of Wales' distinct political reality and linguistic and cultural identity. Citizens perceived strongly that Wales as a nation as well as its constituent localities are currently being underserved by a media that does not adequately reflect life in its communities, either in breadth or depth.

There was understanding that some of these issues are more easily addressed than others. Indeed, some areas of the Citizens' Panel discussion lie within the powers currently devolved to the Senedd, and some are outside of it. In particular, there was acknowledgement of the fact that media regulation has to be considered in relation to the global nature of the market and at a national level only so much can be achieved, hence the need for international cooperation and shared oversight.

On the basis of their discussions, the Citizens' Panel recommended the following:

- **'establish an effective and powerful regulatory body, covering all media organisations active in Wales, including press, broadcast and online (to make free speech accountable, not to curtail it)'**

[82% agreed or strongly agreed]

- **'to provide independent confirmation of the accuracy of the news'**

[91% agreed or strongly agreed]

In order to generate our final recommendations, The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs took the Panel's suggestions and conducted an analysis against the prevailing political context and media landscape in Wales.

CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

The current regulatory landscape is a complicated one – and one that crosses borders.

In relation to the press, in 2013 the UK Parliament established the *Royal Charter on Self-Regulation of the Press* which in turn established the Press Recognition Panel (PRP), which is tasked with approving press regulators. Most UK newspapers are members of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the UK's industry funded regulator for the newspaper and magazine industry (including online newspapers) in the UK, including those based or active in Wales. IPSO has never applied for PRP approval and is not seen as meeting the relevant criteria. Some smaller titles are members of The Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS) (including, for instance, *WalesOnline*). IMPRESS has applied for and received PRP approval. Some newspapers are members of IPSO and IMPRESS. Others are not members of any regulator.

Another issue to consider here is regulatory jurisdiction and the fact that Welsh issues may be covered by newspapers sold in Wales but not based in Wales or owned by a Welsh company. It is therefore difficult within the existing devolution settlement and the current media landscape to regulate media in Wales effectively, hence our recommendation for a non-binding best practice framework that would raise the bar for all media in Wales across a range of metrics.

Arguments from the press against external regulation usually refer to the importance of a free press for the workings of democracy, which is certainly important. But a free press is undermined if its users feel they cannot trust the information presented, or if a large proportion of the potential audience feels there is a lack of quality in their local and national media. Regulation is one way to help restore trust and confidence, as well as a commitment to qualitative standards to enhance media provision for citizens.

Moving on to television and radio, broadcasting is not a devolved function of Wales. Broadcasting is regulated by The Office of Communications (Ofcom), and while there is currently an Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales, which provides advice about the opinions and interests of the people of Wales, overall Ofcom is a function of the UK government. '*Exploring the devolution of broadcasting*', a 2021 report by the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee of the Fifth Senedd, called for Wales to have more powers over broadcasting, including powers over Welsh language public service broadcasting and more content produced in Wales. We note that the *Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales* is primarily concerned with broadcasting, but recommend a broader remit for this nascent body as it would make an appropriate home for made-for-Wales regulatory interventions across the whole media sphere, thus avoiding potential confusion or any need for duplication.

In relation to online media, the UK Government has declared its intention to regulate digital platform providers, via Ofcom. The *Online Safety Bill* (2022), as drafted in summer 2022, states an intention to create a duty of care for online platforms, requiring them to protect individuals from certain types of online harm. This is somewhat controversial legislation; concerns include the proposal to restrain lawful but harmful speech, although the recently appointed Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has suggested this may be amended (BBC, 2022). But the Bill is an attempt to address the power of large multimedia companies and a recognition of the fact that current legislation has not kept pace with media developments.

Such debates are not unique to the UK. The Open Government Partnership (2021), for instance, an organisation dedicated to transforming how governments serve citizens, has produced a list of action points for transparent and accountable digital governance, including the need to be digitally inclusive, tackle misinformation and disinformation, protect against surveillance and censorship, and prevent online harassment.

What such discussions make clear is that media regulation needs to be considered on a transnational basis. Indeed, there are various tensions at play, such as the one between news produced in Wales (and/or by Welsh citizens) versus that produced outside of Wales but about Wales, the tension between a focus on the local versus discussion of UK-wide and international issues, and the tension between free speech and protection from harm. It is also a fast-moving policy area, in the UK and internationally, and therefore needs to be treated with some caution about what is possible, and over what timescale.

But in spite of the various challenges involved in addressing media regulation, the results of the Citizens' Panel show a clear desire for more to be done in this area.

DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5** We recommend that the Welsh Government should take steps to strengthen Democracy and Citizenship education in schools, including more explicit guidance for the teaching of democracy and citizenship (local, national and global), as well as the modern history and politics of Wales, within the Humanities area of learning and experience (AOLE) of Curriculum for Wales
- 6** We further recommended that the Welsh Government should ensure the new GCSE qualifications in History and Social Studies include significant Wales-relevant components on politics and democratic processes
- 7** We recommend that the Welsh Government should create appropriate teacher training pathways, including PGCEs and in-service training to allow for specialisation in Social Studies, including politics



OVERVIEW

Democracy and Citizenship education was a strong theme throughout the Citizens' Panel's discussions, being identified very early as a potential solution to the initial conclusion that the news media does not adequately engage the public in understanding politics. From the beginning of the learning phase, most participants said that they felt that their own levels of knowledge about politics, democratic structures and their own elected representatives were inadequate, and that they did not have trusted, easily-accessible information to redress this. There was wide agreement that participants had been underserved by their schooling around citizenship, and much frustration that Democracy and Citizenship education initiatives are rarely aimed at adults.

There was acknowledgement of some of the difficulties of implementing good quality Democracy and Citizenship education, including the pace of political change, pressures on the school curriculum, and the difficulties around maintaining impartiality, as well as an identification of jargon as a major barrier to the educative function of the media.

During deliberation, agreement coalesced around the need for Democracy and Citizenship education for all age groups, with schools identified as an easier path to implementation followed by much more detailed discussion around innovative ideas for how the adult population of Wales might be engaged with high quality Democracy and Citizenship education (these ideas are outlined further in our recommendations pertaining to 'Recognising Welshness' in Chapter 4).

On the basis of their discussions, the Citizens' Panel recommended the following:

- **'Supplement the current life skills/Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) syllabus with an additional focus on the current practice and history of politics within school curriculums, by means of a combined compulsory Personal and Social Education (PSE) class'** [73% agree or strongly agree]
- **'Bring politics to the wider community by promoting and encouraging a deliverable government funded educational service using a variety of accessible platforms'** [83% agree or strongly agree]

In order to generate our final recommendations, The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs took the Panel's suggestions and conducted an analysis against the prevailing political context and media landscape in Wales.

CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

The discussions of the Citizens' Panel around this recommendation reinforce from an adult perspective the views of 200 young people who participated in 'Our Voices Heard', a project run by Electoral Reform Society Cymru (ERS) in 2018, which called for a very similar range of interventions to support citizens' understanding of the democratic process, political parties, institutions and campaigning. Both groups 'wanted to learn about politics [and] wanted to see more of their politicians.'

As outlined by the ERS in 2020, Welsh Government has supported the creation of political education resources for use in Welsh schools but not mandated political education 'as a distinct subject or compulsory topic'.

It is important to note here that the legacy subjects of PSE and PHSE have been incorporated into the Health and Wellbeing area of learning and experience (AOLE) of Curriculum for Wales (CfW), and that some aspects of Democracy and Citizenship education are already included in the 'What Matters' statements in the Humanities AOLE.

Under the statement 'Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs', governance – defined as 'the systems and ways in which countries, communities and organisations are led and managed' – is listed as a key concept that learners will explore, alongside chronology, change and continuity, diversity, cause and effect, interconnectedness, community, identity and belonging, and authority.

Under the statement 'Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action' there is further statutory guidance that learners will 'explore concepts, including citizenship, authority and governance, interconnectedness, justice and equality, enterprise, rights, and social action and responsibility', enabling them to 'take committed social action as caring, participative citizens of their local, national and global communities, showing an understanding of and commitment to justice, diversity and the protection of the environment'.

Despite this high level conceptual guidance, the emphasis that CfW places on individual schools' autonomy presents a high risk of variance in the specificity of the Democracy and Citizenship education learners will actually receive. We therefore recommend that explicit Democracy and Citizenship education focused on the democratic process at UK, Wales and local levels be stipulated in the guidance, with clear links to a high quality package of resources linked to teacher training.

Although CfW is currently being rolled out, qualifications to replace GCSEs are very much still under construction, and it is worth noting that 'Reforming qualifications' is a key part of The Co-operation Agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. In 'Qualified for the Future' (October 2021) Qualifications Wales communicated its decision to create a new GCSE in History. In paragraph 5.66 'the need for Welsh history to be a key component of the new GCSE History qualification' is noted. There is a clear opportunity here for any new component on modern Welsh history to include the study of devolution, the creation of the National Assembly for Wales and its development into the Senedd, as well as – importantly – the relationships between the different parliaments and jurisdictions of the United Kingdom.

In the same document, Qualifications Wales communicates its decision to create a new GCSE in Social Studies, a 'multi-disciplinary qualification align[ed] with the aims and purposes of the new curriculum'. 'Qualified for the Future' states that 'working groups will be convened at individual subject level to develop proposals for how the content and assessment of each future qualification could support effective curriculum design and teaching practice' (5.78) and that it would ensure progression to further study of 'related subjects such as law, sociology, and politics' (5.80).

Although this GCSE would be optional, 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. All schools in Wales could be mandated to appoint a Democracy and Citizenship education lead, with an attached teaching and learning responsibility. This role would carry with it the responsibility to be the point of contact for elected representatives from all parties and all appropriate levels of governance to visit the school in the spirit of both our Citizens' Panel's recommendations and the emphasis within CfW on authentic learning contexts.

RECOGNISING WELSHNESS

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8 We endorse the commitment in the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru Co-operation Agreement to 'fund existing and new enterprises to improve Welsh-based journalism to tackle the information deficit' and recommend that further funding be allocated to support new career entrants from a wide range of backgrounds in localities across Wales to access journalistic training, with a specific focus on improving the media coverage of Welsh matters, Welsh-language provision and addressing under-represented groups
- 9 We recommend that the Welsh Government should create a Task and Finish Group to deliver a range of high quality Democracy and Citizenship education resources for both school pupils and adults; co-produced with citizens, disseminated through a wide range of community settings and digital channels, and backed by a well-funded public information campaign aimed at a diverse range of groups



OVERVIEW

The Citizens' Panel agreed that a key weakness of Wales' media landscape is that it does not adequately serve individuals and communities in Wales. A strong theme of the discussions was the London-centric nature of the UK news media. Many participants expressed that they were not consciously aware of the lack of a Welsh dimension to the news they consumed, and that their involvement in this project had usefully allowed them to see the news differently.

In addition to a developing understanding of the 'democratic deficit' caused by a lack of attention paid to Welsh politics by UK news sources, participants also identified a vital information deficit relating to Welsh history and culture, including the Welsh language.

Participants expressed surprise that news about Wales is not largely produced in Wales by Welsh journalists, and quickly formed a consensus that Wales should not be neglected by UK media sources. To redress these issues, the Panel felt that it was important for Welsh citizens to have easy access to stories about their own local areas as well as about decisions made that affect their lives, and a better understanding of where these decisions are taken, and by whom. They felt that a solution to this would be specific funding to train journalists who would be embedded in local communities, connected to other local citizens and knowledgeable about Welsh history, culture and politics.

On the basis of their discussions, the Citizens' Panel recommended the following:

- **'Welsh news must be produced in Wales by journalists who live in Wales or know the country'** [59% agreed or strongly agreed]
- **'The Welsh Government to set up public funding source[s] to support the development of local groups to provide online, accessible local news'** [67% agree or strongly agree]
- **'Create a readily available information service aimed at adults including online, print and audio resources about Wales' history, culture and political system, through the Welsh Government's education department and universities'** [91% agree or strongly agree]
- **'Bring politics to the wider community by promoting and encouraging a deliverable government funded educational service using a variety of accessible platforms'** [83% agree or strongly agree]

In order to generate our final recommendations, The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs took the Panel's suggestions and conducted an analysis against the prevailing political context and media landscape in Wales.

CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

The Citizens' Panel's recommendations clearly arise from concern about localities being underserved by news media. This follows a well-documented and marked decline of local newspapers, with some areas of Wales described as 'news deserts' (see Howells' 2015 work on Port Talbot). There is clearly a need to identify these and 'plug' news gaps for underserved communities, and equally important to note that 'news deserts' are not always geographical and can also relate to particular communities which otherwise appear to be well served (for example, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities; socio-economically deprived communities, etc.).

A recent Welsh Government funding initiative through Creative Wales to support BBC Cymru Wales, ITV Cymru Wales, S4C and Channel 4 aims to 'increase opportunities for diverse communities in film and TV in Wales', but the major challenge is the lack of capacity within the current Welsh media landscape to support entry-level journalists from diverse backgrounds. Support from the Welsh Government via the Books Council of Wales' New Audiences Fund (2022) was also recently announced, with just under £200,000 made available to develop new opportunities and audiences in the Welsh publishing sector, including community-based projects to collect stories and mentoring underrepresented writers. But it is clear that further substantial and targeted investment is needed to support new routes into the industry.

Current Careers Wales advice on routes into journalism acknowledges that direct entry into the industry via training contracts is becoming rarer all the time, that most entrants are graduates and that competition for jobs is fierce. Perhaps the overall situation is best summarised through the fact that fewer than 1,000 people are employed as journalists in Wales, and that expected future demand for Journalist and related jobs is low compared to other jobs in Wales (EMSI, 2022).

A consistent thread running through the Citizens' Panel's conversation concerned regional differences within Wales, notably a perceived divide between north and south and a tendency for Cardiff and the south-east to dominate conceptions of Welshness, as well as for the media to be part of the same 'bubble' as politicians. There followed a keen interest in localism and decentralisation.

The Citizens' Panel was supportive of Welsh language media, but also remarked that monoglot English speakers in Wales are particularly underserved in not having adequate access to content produced in the Welsh language, and it was felt more should be done to facilitate dialogue between English and Welsh language media sources.

There was some debate about the extent to which it is the purpose of the media to inform citizens about history and culture, but it was felt that reporting contemporary issues should be done with due regard to relevant historical and cultural context, including a Welsh lens.

Following on from the recommendations around Democracy and Citizenship education, the identification of adult education initiatives as a key potential driver of increased media and political literacy within the general population was a recurrent theme of the Citizens' Panel's deliberations.

It was recognised that with trust in politicians at its lowest ever level, significant barriers exist to engaging the public in such initiatives, and that they would need to be delivered across a diverse range of formats in order to reach a wide range of people. There was a shared understanding that resources would need to be a mix of digital – 'visual, audio and interactive' – and face-to-face opportunities and that significant investment and careful planning would be required to avoid duplication.

We suggest that a Task and Finish Group – to include political representatives from all levels of governance in Wales, media industry professionals, educationalists and a panel of citizens – could audit existing work in the field, identify best practice, curate existing resources and create new ones to fill identified gaps. The group should also be tasked with creating a wide range of mechanisms for dissemination and the design of a high profile public information campaign to ensure maximum reach. Democracy Group Cymru, chaired by ERS Cymru, is an existing network of stakeholders working for positive change in this space, and could potentially be an appropriate host for this work.

CONCLUSION: VOICES OF HOPE

One of the most heartening aspects of this work has been the universally positive response to the process from the 15 citizens who gave up 19 hours of their time to commit to learning and deliberating around a topic on which most had little prior knowledge but felt to be of great importance for the good of society. 12 of the 15 participants committed to staying in touch with The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs to be involved in disseminating the research, and all agreed that they had enjoyed and been educated by the process. Even more hopefully, they all felt listened to in a way that they said was rare in today's society, where too often citizens' voices go unheard.

So, despite the well-documented, and major, challenges faced by our media in Wales, we offer these recommendations in the same spirit within which they were developed – a spirit of hope. The conclusions reached by our Citizens' Panel echo many of the points made repeatedly by experts working within the media and democracy space in Wales over the past decade and more. Our hope now is that action will follow swiftly; as in so many fields, Wales' status as a small country allows for the potential for simple interventions to yield productive results. We believe that implementing these recommendations will take us several steps further toward the media environment our citizens both aspire to and deserve.

Our Citizens' voices are voices of hope, but they tell us we urgently need to make the media work for the people of Wales. Our democracy depends on it.

4

APPENDIX

PUTTING TOGETHER THE CITIZENS' PANEL

PUTTING TOGETHER THE CITIZENS' PANEL

This Citizens' Panel was designed to reflect (as far as possible within the resources available) a Citizens' Jury, using the developing standards created by a network of practitioners during 2020-2021. Keen to adopt a 'test and learn' approach, the partnership used their resources to utilise the principles and the process of a Citizens' Jury on a slightly smaller scale: the Panel of 15 reflects the size of a typical Citizens' Jury, but rather than meet for 30-45 hours, the Panel met for 19 hours, and received £190 as a gesture of goodwill for their time.

The Panel had a single question to consider – 'How well does the news help you understand politics?' – developed over two independently facilitated meetings with a group of professionals drawn from The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs. The Panel was tasked with developing recommendations in response to that question.

PANEL RECRUITMENT

Citizens' Juries and Assemblies use a process of recruitment called 'sortition'. This Panel used Sortition Foundation to select the 15 participants using national demographic targets as set out below:

- Gender
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Education (level of highest qualifications)
- Geography (location of residence within Wales)
- Urban/rural
- Welsh speaker
- Senedd voter

Our aim was to slightly 'over-recruit' within demographic categories typically underrepresented in democratic deliberative processes, as research shows these groups are also far less likely to volunteer for such activities.

For example, we therefore aimed to have slightly more representatives of younger age categories, non-voters and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

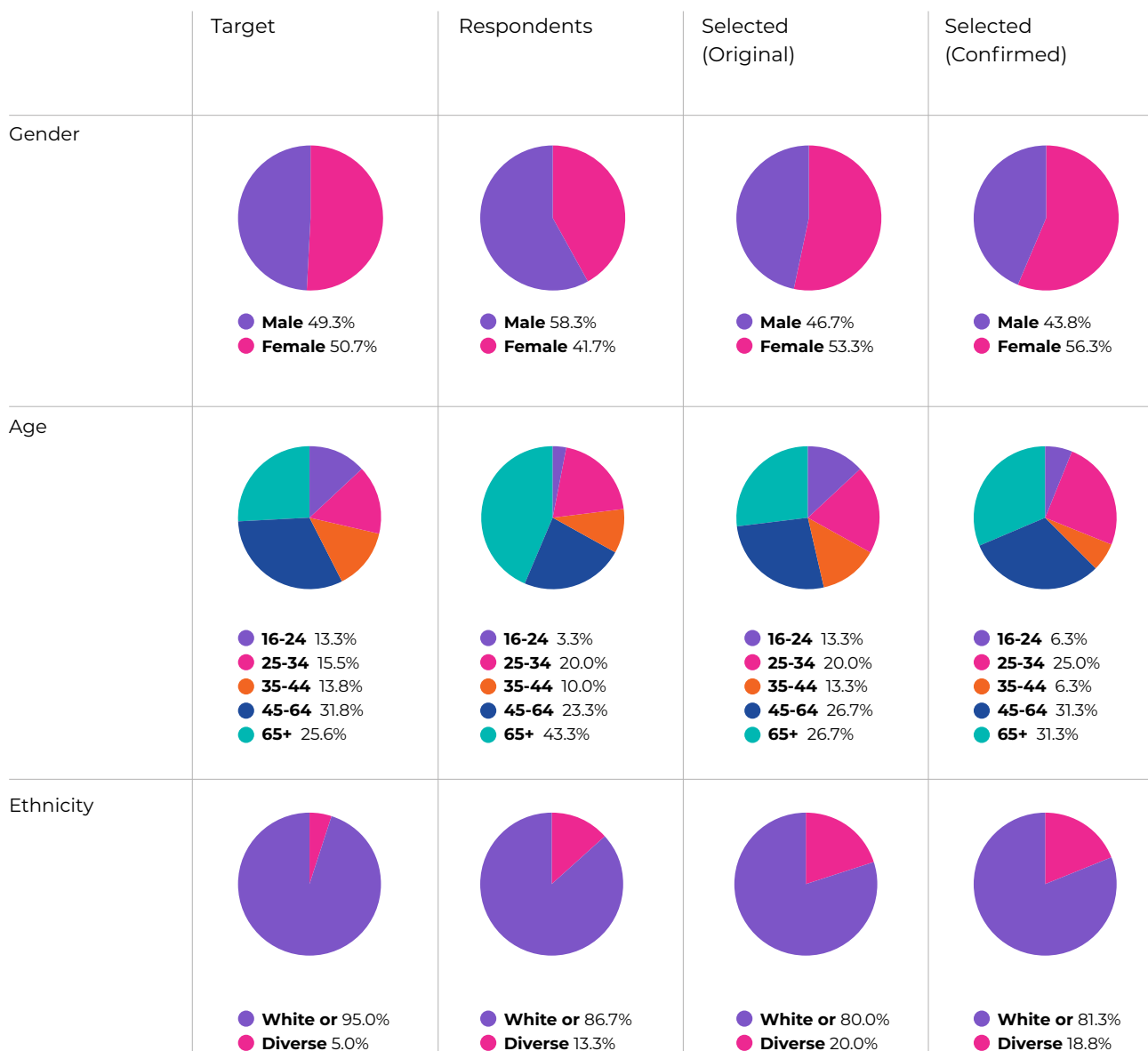
However, given a 100% replacement rate throughout the process, it proved difficult to hit or exceed these targets.

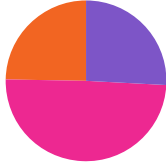
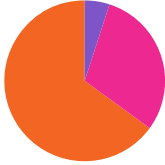
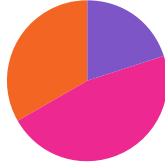





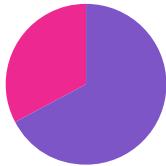
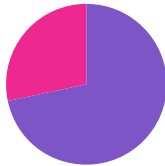
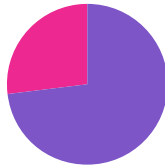

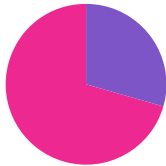
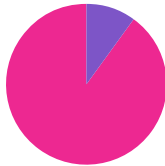
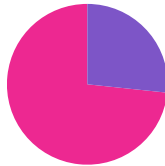
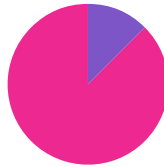

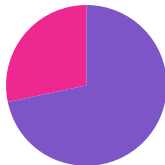


The pie charts below show our original targets within each demographic category; the level of response within each category; our selection (made to ensure close adherence to the original target); and the final group who participated.

Together they demonstrate the difficulties inherent in the process, as well as the degree of success achieved within each category.

Participants received one or more phone calls as well as emails to ensure they were able to fully participate with ease. Any additional needs or digital requirements were supported with the offer of technology and personalised practice sessions.

Figure 1: A breakdown of our demographic targets



	Target	Respondents	Selected (Original)	Selected (Confirmed)
Education	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No qualifications 25.9% ● Qualls below level 4 49.6% ● Qualls level 4 & above 24.5% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No qualifications 5.0% ● Qualls below level 4 30.0% ● Qualls level 4 & above 65.0% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No qualifications 20.0% ● Qualls below level 4 46.7% ● Qualls level 4 & above 33.3% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No qualifications 12.5% ● Qualls below level 4 37.5% ● Qualls level 4 & above 50.0%
Geography	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North Wales 20.0% ● Mid & West Wales 18.7% ● South Wales East 17.3% ● South Wales West 23.3% ● South Wales Central 20.7% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North Wales 16.7% ● Mid & West Wales 21.7% ● South Wales East 23.3% ● South Wales West 15.0% ● South Wales Central 23.3% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North Wales 20.0% ● Mid & West Wales 20.0% ● South Wales East 13.3% ● South Wales West 20.0% ● South Wales Central 26.7% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North Wales 18.8% ● Mid & West Wales 25.0% ● South Wales East 18.8% ● South Wales West 6.3% ● South Wales Central 31.3%
Urban Rural	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Urban 67.3% ● Rural 32.7% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Urban 71.7% ● Rural 28.3% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Urban 73.3% ● Rural 26.7% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Urban 62.5% ● Rural 37.5%
Welsh Speaker	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 29.5% ● No 70.5% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 10.0% ● No 90.0% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 26.7% ● No 73.3% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 12.5% ● No 87.5%
Senedd voter	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 42.0% ● No 58.0% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 71.7% ● No 28.3% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 46.7% ● No 53.3% 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes 50.0% ● No 50.0%

SPEAKERS

Over the course of three weeks, the Panel heard from speakers with different expertise relating to the media and government in Wales:

Jess Blair

Director, Electoral Reform Society

Ali Goldsworthy

President, Accord, and author

Delyth Jewell MS

Chair, Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language,
Sport and International Relations Committee

Shirish Kulkarni

Award winning journalist, trainer and researcher

Huw Marshall

Founder of *The National Wales*, Founder of Annwen, journalist

Dr Ifan Morgan Jones

Lecturer in Journalism, Bangor University, Founder of Nation.Cymru

Each speaker completed a template and short 10 minute interview that was shared with participants. Five of the seven speakers also attended the learning sessions to answer questions live.

THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS

19 hours of online sessions were structured in the following way:

Information Session;

Informing the group what to expect over the sessions and what the purpose of the process is (to receive recommendations from 'ordinary' people to inform the media industry, local authorities, and Welsh Government of the changes that the public feel are necessary in helping them to understand Welsh politics.) This session allows people to test technology and ask questions about the process.

Learning Phase;

2 x 3 hour sessions on a Saturday. Participants heard from experts in the fields of politics, fake news, alternative media, funding and regulation to deepen their understanding of how well the news helps people to understand politics.

Deliberation Phase;

2 x 3 hour sessions on a Sunday. This day brought together what participants heard from the experts and their own experiences so that they could identify potential trade-offs, and develop their own views and ideas to inform their recommendations.

Recommendations Phase;

6 hour session (Tuesday afternoon to evening) where participants held themed discussions based on their deliberations from the previous sessions. Recommendations were drafted, reviewed, redrafted and rewritten before going to the group vote. For a recommendation to be 'approved' it required 80% of the panel's vote. These were then presented to representatives from the OU, IWA, journalists, and a Member of the Senedd.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Citizens' Panel were guided through the following process to create strong recommendations:

- The Panel agrees criteria for assessing the recommendations
- They co-create a number of draft recommendations in smaller groups (with two or three other participants)
- Each group then shares their recommendations with the other participants who assess and review the other group's first draft
- Recommendations are amended to accommodate the views expressed by others, and generally strengthen the recommendations
- Each group shares their final recommendation with the wider panel, and all participants vote for each recommendation on a scale of 1-5 (1 = strongly do not support, 5 = strongly support)
- Recommendations must have a combined percentage of 80% votes in signifying that participants either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' in order to go forward
- All recommendations with over 80% support from participants are then presented to the relevant stakeholders (the Senedd Member, OU, IWA).

The full recommendations from the panel, including the notes and deliberation, can be found on the project [website](#).

CHALLENGES

There were two core challenges in this process:

Recruitment

With a relatively low response rate the pool to select from was smaller than usual, making the target demographics harder to reach. This is a significant challenge in the process for two key reasons:

- We had an unprecedented 100% panel replacement: 15 replacements were made for a 15-person panel. There was no obvious reason why this happened – people had very different personal and work related reasons, but when the pool is fairly small to start with you run the risk of not meeting the targets
- Age and level of education are often the hardest demographic targets to reach due to relatively low numbers signing up from the youngest age group and those with the lowest level of formal qualifications. With a low response rate and high replacement rate, these targets proved even more challenging to meet accurately.

Assembling a group that reflects the broader general population brings with it support challenges. Participants who suffer with conditions that affect participation such as severe anxiety, or those who have never been involved in this type of democratic decision making require additional dialogue and support prior to and during each session to ensure they feel confident participating. All participants were fully supported, and the success of this approach was reflected in the retention of the group: the process started and finished with 15 participants. In the last session only one person could not attend, for work reasons.

Timing

Full Citizens' Assemblies usually take place over the course of several weeks or months (between 30 and 45 hours). Condensing the 19 hours over the space of two weeks may have affected initial recruitment (availability for participants may have been reduced), and it can also affect the amount of time available to hear from a broader set of speakers. It is good practice to encourage participants to suggest alternative speakers or perspectives. This is possible with space and time to invite others in between sessions, but with a shorter process that time is not possible. In this case participants' suggestions for speakers from the UK media could not be accommodated. With more space between sessions, it could have.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

By asking the group to create recommendations that would be acceptable to at least 80% of the group they had to ensure they listened and responded to comments on their first drafts. Everyone was then able to express their support through an anonymous vote.

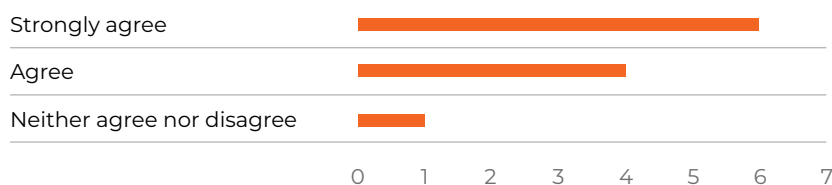
This Citizens' Panel allowed a diverse set of individuals in Wales to come together, all of whom had different understandings of politics, accessed news through different media outlets, and had different values and political positions based on their experiences of living in different parts of Wales. Whilst it could be argued that 'self-selection' takes place in the initial response stage of recruitment, the rationale for that self-selection is largely based on payment rather than the topic or the potential for influence, which might otherwise encourage more active citizens to engage through more traditional techniques.

In this case many of the participants expressed 'embarrassment' at not knowing anything about political decision making in Wales, nor engaging regularly with the news about politics. This view was contrasted with some who were very passionate about how they receive their news about politics. Deliberation and debate that enables those experiences to be better understood results in well thought through recommendations that are likely to be acceptable to the general diversity within the population of Wales.

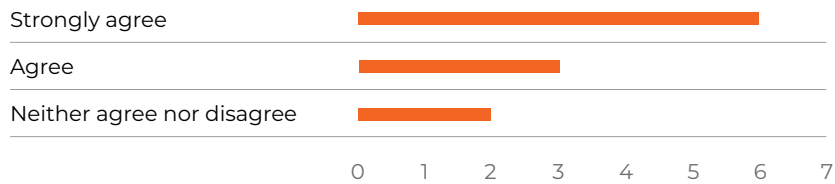
FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

All feedback was positive from participants, with agreement that taking part in the Citizens' Panel had provided them with more knowledge on the subject, more confidence in expressing alternate views, and a greater willingness to participate in public engagement initiatives in the future. The charts below show feedback given by 11 of the panel members who were willing for this to be shared:

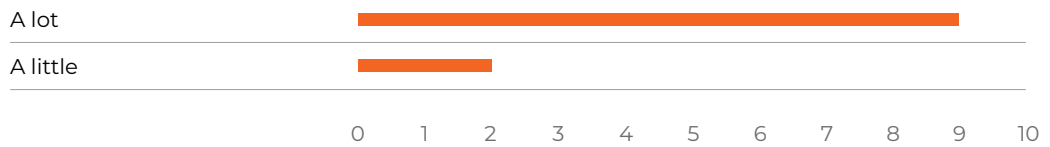
As a result of taking part in this Citizens' Panel, I now feel more informed about Wales' democratic system of government and its media landscape



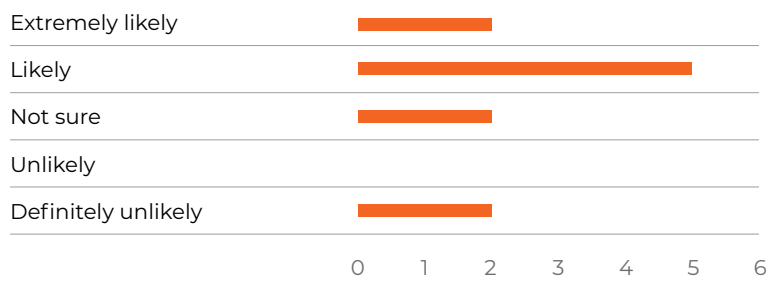
As a result of taking part in this Citizens' Panel, I now feel more confident expressing my view and participating in Wales' democracy.



To what extent has this process enabled you to hear alternative perspectives to your own?



As a result of taking part in this Citizens' Panel, how likely would you be to get involved in a similar process again?



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