



The Campaign
for a
Children & Young People's
Assembly for Wales



Our Rights, Our Parliament

The Story of the Campaign for the
Children and Young People's Assembly
for Wales, 2014 – 2018

*And a forward look to the
Welsh Youth Parliament 2018 -*

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Foreword

When I visited Wales last year, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet some of the people who were involved in the Campaign for the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales. I was impressed by the fact that in Wales there was broad and growing acceptance that children are not simply passive observers in the world, but that they are and must be active citizens and agents of change.

As one young person from Rhondda Cynon Taff explains in this report: "It only makes sense to have a youth assembly ... It encourages younger generations to become more politically active – getting their voices heard, instead of being drowned out in the noise." I could not agree more.

It is imperative that young people are empowered to build the arguments that will maintain and reform our democracies. I learned during my visit that the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales and her team were working together with the young campaigners and others, so I am delighted but not surprised to learn that, at the time of this report, the election process toward the first Welsh Youth Parliament is underway. The innovative online voter registration for 11–18 year olds is another remarkable achievement that I am thrilled to see happening.

I congratulate you on this report and on the success of the campaign. I look forward to the next chapter in the story of children's human rights and democracy in Wales, and am proud that the Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law has played a part in the story so far, and will continue to do so in the future. Onward!

Hillary Rodham Clinton



Foreword

It is important that the incredible effort, the tireless campaigning and the meticulous preparatory work, all of which has been undertaken by so many people and organisations in establishing a Welsh Youth Parliament, are documented, acknowledged and celebrated. This publication is a wonderful contribution to recalling that story – a tale which has been dominated by, above all else, the tenacity and resolve of young people to have their voices heard.

Young people's participation in Wales has evolved and developed, often in parallel with the devolution process. We now have a confident and mature national Parliament with a very real sense of purpose and with the powers to match. It is incumbent upon us, as a modern, innovative and progressive Parliament, to create a similarly robust democratic structure for the nation's young people. The Welsh Youth Parliament will be intrinsically linked to our national Parliament and it will serve as an important forum where young people's voices will have a material influence on the decisions made."

As a nation committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, implementing such an ambitious project is a significant development for Wales and it is our privilege as a National Parliament to deliver this commitment.

In the context of our work as a legislature, establishing the Youth Parliament ensures that we are discharging our duties to the voters of today and tomorrow - to each and every citizen in Wales – all of whom have a stake in our democracy.

**Elin Jones AM,
Presiding Officer, National Assembly for Wales**

The Case for Youth Parliaments

Why should a country have a youth parliament? They exist in many countries.¹

The main reasons given for them are to:

- provide an opportunity for young people to get their voices heard and listened to on issues that affect them;
- act as a national platform for youth advocacy, having influence on national policy and legislation;
- provide national platforms for the participation of young people in democracy, creating stronger, more inclusive countries;
- develop political education of young people, supporting and developing their understanding of democracy;
- support young people's personal development, including skills and confidence;
- help young people become active and responsible citizens.²

Most youth parliaments have a minimum age of 11 or above.³ *Children's* parliaments, involving younger children, are rare, and there is less agreement about whether and if so, how, younger children can or should be involved. However, there are some good reasons for thinking that younger children should be able to be involved. Younger children can grow the habits of democratic citizenship, even if their capability to conceptualize them as such may come later. Their public spheres may be smaller – perhaps simply their class, school or community group, but habits of inclusion that start small may grow big. And *all* children – that is everyone below the age of 18 – have the same participative rights. The only difference age makes is *how* those rights can be exercised in practice.⁴

¹ Over one third of the 100 responses from Member Parliaments surveyed in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's 2014 report, Youth participation in national parliaments, had a youth parliament; Inter-parliamentary Union (2014) Youth participation in national parliaments http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youth_en.pdf

² Distilled from Croke (2015) *A new Youth Assembly for Wales? A comparative exploration into the best practice elements of 17 youth parliaments in the UK, Europe and globally*. CYPAW. The report drew on evidence collected from 17 youth parliaments and from evidence in the Inter-parliamentary Union report (n. 1).

³ Ibid, n.2.

⁴ General Comment No. 12 on the right of the child to be heard, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009. CRC/C/GC/12.

The case for youth parliaments draws strength from the principle of inter-generational justice. Whether the threshold age for democratic participation is 18, or 16, or 12, or any other age, those below it are excluded and it is not clear how their interests are adequately protected on decisions that often will affect the young far more than they will affect the people making the decisions. Youth parliaments may provide at least part of a solution to this problem. In 2014, the Campaign for the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales was formed to try to work out how this could be done on a sustainable basis in Wales.

Welsh Devolution and the 'Dragon's Dialogue'

From the outset of devolved government in 1999, Wales was a place of experimentation and innovation on children's human rights. Early policies of the National Assembly for Wales included *Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership* setting out a rights-based vision for local children's services and *Extending Entitlement* which directed youth services to work within a framework of entitlements derived from the UNCRC. Wales was the first UK country to establish a Children's Commissioner and to require the Commissioner to have regard to the UNCRC when exercising functions. In 2004, the National Assembly for Wales' explicitly rights-based *Rights to Action* strategy stood in contrast to the welfare-oriented English equivalent, *Every Child Matters*. The Assembly adopted a resolution saying that the UNCRC would be the framework of principle for all its actions concerning children.⁵

It was in this context that the idea of a national youth forum grew. In 1999, the findings of the *Lost in Care* Report were new and raw.⁶ The Inquiry had documented appalling failures to protect and – crucially – to *listen* to children in the care system in Wales. This generated urgency and impetus to the argument for better structures to recognize children's human rights, take children's concerns seriously and empower them to have a voice in decisions affecting them, at all levels.

In 1999, the Welsh Assembly Government (then the executive wing of the National Assembly for Wales), supported the establishment of a charitable company called Funky Dragon which became known as the 'Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales'. There were two events which fed into this development. First, a young people's conference in 1998, inspired by Julie Morgan MP and run by Children in Wales, resolved that there should be a national youth platform to interact with the Welsh Assembly Government. Second, the then First Minister Alun Michael encouraged a steering group of professional youth workers, local and Welsh government officials, called 'Young Wales' to start thinking about such a platform within the new framework of Welsh devolution. These two groups came together in the summer of 1999 in a conference at the National Assembly for Wales called 'Breaking Barriers', in which one hundred young people participated in debate on the question:

⁵ Butler, I. and Drakeford, M. 'Children's rights as a policy framework in Wales', in J. Williams (ed.) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Wales*, 2013, University of Wales Press.

⁶ *Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Care in the Former County Council Areas of Gwynedd and Clwyd since 1974*, UK Department of Health, 1999.

If Wales had an organisation run by young people, what would it look like and what would it do?

Participants in that event felt that its outcome provided a 'clear mandate' to establish a permanent structure for young people across Wales.⁷ A committee was formed, facilitated by the Welsh Assembly Government, and set about building the organization. Government funding was committed to support the new organization, and in 2002, Funky Dragon was incorporated as a company with the following objects:

... to advance the education and training of children and young people under the age of 26 years and their spiritual and physical welfare by:

- 1. The involvement of children and young people in decision making; and*
- 2. Improving the effectiveness of services to children and young people in Wales.⁸*

The company was registered as a charity in May 2004, after lengthy negotiations which ended with Funky Dragon being the first charity to have people under the age of 18 as trustees. The trustees also formed a management committee, with the majority being young people so that it could be seen to be led by young people.

The trustees and management committee adopted a Mission Statement:

Funky Dragon's Mission Statement

Funky Dragon is the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales.

The organisation was established as a charity in 2004. Funky Dragon's main aim is to provide an opportunity for 0 – 25 year olds to get their voices heard on issues that affect them. One of the most important things about Funky Dragon is that it is a young people led organisation. Funky Dragon is a way for young people in Wales to speak directly to the Welsh Assembly Government and other policy-makers. The opportunity to be listened to, is a fundamental right under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This gives all young people the opportunity to participate and be listened to.

⁷ Funky Dragon, 'Our Rights, Our Story: Funky Dragon's Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child' in A. Invernizzi and J. Williams *The Human Rights of Children: From Visions to Implementation*, Ashgate, 2011.

⁸ Articles of Association, Funky Dragon, 24 June 2002.

During the 12 years of its operations, this Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales had a Grand Council made up of young people elected by their peers from all of Wales' 22 local authorities, as well as 'specific interest' representatives and co-opted members to ensure that minority voices were heard.⁹ The Grand Council had between 66 and 100 members aged 11 – 24, who met in residential weekends and other meetings. Supported by professional youth workers, they carried out research, produced reports and sought out opportunities to promote their recommendations to decision-makers. They engaged with youth parliaments or forums in Scotland and Northern Ireland and sent representatives to the UK Youth Parliament¹⁰ and Young European Ambassadors events. They also engaged with UK parliamentary select committees and were involved in supporting the work of international organisations such as Children as Actors for Transforming Society (CATS).



In the early years of Funky Dragon, the Grand Council enjoyed a dynamic relationship with Welsh Ministers and their officials. The 'Dragon's Dialogue',¹¹ in which Welsh Ministers and officials consulted the Grand Council and invited representatives to Cabinet meetings, was celebrated on both sides. Welsh Ministers proclaimed these ways of working, acknowledging Funky Dragon as the national platform which enabled the National Assembly for Wales and its government to be informed by young people's views.¹²



⁹ At its largest, the Grand Council comprised 4 young people from the youth forum in each of the 22 unitary authorities in Wales and 12 co-opted members from other organisations. Grand Council Members were asked to commit to a 2-year term.

¹⁰ To ensure representation from across the UK, the UKYP appointed a Regional Coordinator in each of the nine English regions and made agreements with agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure representation from across the UK.

¹¹ Welsh Government and Funky Dragon, *The Dragon's Dialogue*, 2003. ISBN 0 7504 3152 0

¹² For example, Jane Davidson AM, Record of Proceedings, National Assembly for Wales, 11.03.2003; First Minister of Wales, Record of Proceedings, National Assembly for Wales, 05.03.2003.

The Dynamic of the UNCRC

The case for a children and young people's parliament is supported by the UNCRC, which requires States Parties to recognize the participative rights of persons under 18. The process of the UNCRC can be a dynamic driver of change, and this is illustrated very well by the story of the Campaign for a Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales.

The UNCRC provides for a specialist monitoring body: the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Its elected members are highly regarded experts on children and human rights from countries across the world. They serve for two years and their job is to examine the progress each State Party is making to give effect to the UNCRC. Each State Party must submit an initial report to the Committee, and then an update every five years. The UN Committee holds sessions to review State Parties' progress. At the end of each State Party reporting round, the Committee publishes its Concluding Observations. The Committee publishes all the documents – the State Party reports, alternative reports (if the alternative reporter so wishes), the lists of the Committee's questions and the governments' replies.

'Alternative reports' may be submitted by anyone outside of government. The Committee holds pre-sessional hearings with the alternative reporters to help inform what questions it will ask the State Party. Wherever possible, the Committee sends a Rapporteur to meet alternative reporters before the pre-sessional hearings. The Committee and visiting Rapporteurs welcome the opportunity to meet with and learn from children.

As well as informing the UN about State Parties' progress in implementing their international obligations under the UNCRC, the process is intended to support advocacy and stimulate local engagement between governments, NGOs, children and young people towards more effective realization of children's human rights.¹³

The Dynamic of the UNCRC



¹³ For more information about the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, go to the Committee's web pages: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRCIntro.aspx>

Funky Dragon and the UNCRC

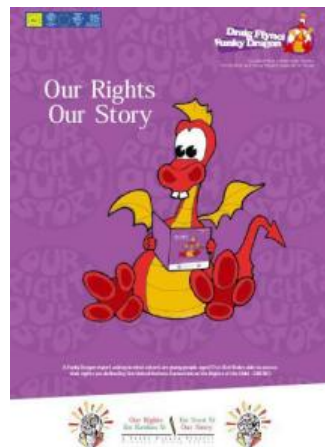
In 2002, in the process of the UK's second report, two young people from the 'Young Wales' steering group travelled with Save the Children (Wales) staff to Geneva for the pre-sessional hearings. Afterwards, the young people reflected that they had gone along as individuals, and could not respond to the Committee's questions as representatives of young people in Wales generally. Their joint recommendation was that if young people went in future they should do so as representatives of young people in Wales and not as individuals.

This inspired Funky Dragon's management committee to organize a representative contribution to the next following UK reporting round in 2008.¹⁴ A group of Grand Council members and staff visited Belgium, where UNICEF had supported young people to write a non-governmental report. In light of what they learned there, they developed a plan for what became *Our Rights Our Story*, ('OROS'). The OROS process was guided by the young people throughout with support from their staff, and initial training by Swansea University researchers.

The OROS research engaged very widely with young people in Wales. Surveys were conducted in assemblies in 45 secondary schools collecting 10,035 survey responses. 140 interactive workshops were held on different themes and 37 interviews were conducted with young people from specific interest groups.¹⁵

The data analysis was conducted by young people from the Grand Council who were trained and supported by staff and who worked at residential meetings and day workshops to develop the findings and recommendations which were then written up by staff.

Ahead of the Geneva pre-sessional hearings, Grand Council representatives met in Wales with UN Committee Chair Professor Jaap Doek. He confirmed that the Committee would welcome a report in any format and would not require them to comply with the general guidelines for alternative reports. They met also with the UN Committee's Rapporteur Professor Lucy Smith, who visited local groups and alternative reporters in Wales.

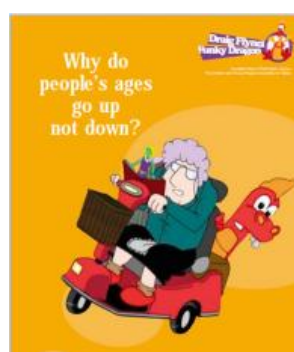


¹⁴ Narrative about the OROS process derived from Funky Dragon, *ibid.* fn. 7 above.

¹⁵ OROS, Funky Dragon, 2008

In Wales, as well as Geneva, the OROS report and recommendations were taken seriously. The Welsh Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Jane Hutt AM, met with the OROS steering group and discussed their 66 recommendations. She instructed her officials to prepare a full response to the report and arranged for the young people to attend a Ministerial Cabinet meeting to present their findings. They also had regular meetings with the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

The OROS report was about young people aged 11 – 18. A second project sought out views of children aged 7 - 10, generating a children's report to the UN Committee, *Why do people's ages go up not down?* While this project was not peer-led, it would prove to be highly significant. The team recruited to conduct the children's research went on to develop the widely-acclaimed *Lleisiau Bach Little Voices* methodology which is now deployed by the Observatory on Children's Human Rights at Swansea and Bangor Universities. Amongst other achievements, this work was to lead in the 2015 UK reporting round to a 'global first': a child-led report by under 11-year-olds to the UN Committee. *Lleisiau Bach*, supported also by successive grants from Big Lottery People and Places, continues to support child-led and age-inclusive projects delivering research impact in the community, as well as a *Children as Researchers network*.¹⁶



In these ways, the UNCRC reporting process contributed towards a constructive dialogue and shared learning between Funky Dragon, Welsh Government, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and other non-governmental organisations.

In response to the quality of this work, together with the presentation the children and young people made at the pre-session meeting of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Funky Dragon was cited as an example of good practice by both the Committee, and in the international guidance to NGOs on how to involve children and young people in reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.¹⁷

¹⁶ Dale, H. and Roberts, A. 2018. *Little Voices Shouting Out*, Final Report <https://bit.ly/2KO8oP2>; Dale, H. & Roberts, A. 2017. *Training Manual-Lleisiau Bach Little Voices* <https://bit.ly/2IEXK0v>

¹⁷ *My Pocket Guide to CRC Reporting*, NGO Group for the CRC, Geneva, 2011.

Structural Challenges and the End of the Beginning

The achievements of the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales during its 12 years of operation are such that it may seem surprising that in October 2014, it all abruptly stopped. The Grand Council met for the last time in the summer of 2014. With the exception of the Lleisiau Bach Little Voices team, who transferred with the Children as Researchers work to the Observatory on Children's Human Rights, all of Funky Dragon's employees were made redundant. Funky Dragon's offices in north and south Wales were emptied and closed.



What happened?

There are many and conflicting accounts, but two key factors are clear.

First, a significant change happened in the constitutional landscape. From 2007, Welsh devolution had a new structure under the Government of Wales Act 2006. Instead of being one body, it split into two: the Welsh Ministers (the Government) and the National Assembly for Wales (the Parliament). In the implementation of this new structure, the functions of the former single body were divided between the two new ones. The functions which enabled support for Funky Dragon were transferred to the Welsh Ministers.



This meant that an organization which had developed an identity as a youth parliament was now positioned on the governmental side of the Welsh constitution, not the parliamentary side. At first it may have seemed that nothing had changed, but over time there were tensions because of the different expectations that the Welsh Government and Funky Dragon had of one another. Engagement between Welsh Ministers and Funky Dragon diminished. Despite the enthusiastic response to OROS, by 2012, Welsh Government had only progressed a small number of changes related to the UN Committee's Concluding Observations of 2008, some 33 of which had reflected recommendations in the OROS report.

In 2013, the Assembly Commission said it would 'explore options for a youth parliament', building on the Assembly's educational outreach service', implicitly calling in question the Grand Council's validity as a youth parliament.¹⁸ Clouds of mutual disenchantment began to gather around the relationship between Funky Dragon and both the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales, despite the good work which the Grand Council continued to do in its various projects and portfolios.

Second, austerity happened. Following the financial crisis of 2008 – 9, the UK Government implemented harsh spending cuts which were felt at all levels, including devolved government in Wales. In 2009, Prime Minister David Cameron announced a new 'age of austerity' and the UK Government's 2010 budget introduced the first of several waves of cuts in public spending aimed at reducing the national budget deficit.

Austerity brought reduced UK Government funding for Wales, and Welsh Ministers had to re-appraise their spending priorities. Amongst many other public spending decisions, they decided to end the funding stream which had supplied core resource to Funky Dragon. The company made an application for funding from a new, differently targeted Welsh Government fund, but was unsuccessful. The staff and trustees made vigorous attempts to find alternative sources of funding, but to no avail.

The process of these funding decisions by Welsh Government left many former members, staff and supporters of Funky Dragon bewildered and angry, especially because, with sad irony, the young people had not been consulted about the proposals or involved in any discussions about what options might be available. This was all the more poignant because during the third Assembly (2007 – 2011), the Assembly had passed the *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011*, giving the UNCRC a special status in Wales, uniquely within the UK. The Measure imposes a duty on Welsh Ministers, when exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the requirements of the Convention. The Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group, an alliance which had advocated successfully for the 2011 Measure, observed in a policy briefing on the 25th anniversary of the UNCRC:

The young people were not directly consulted on the decision to cease funding Funky Dragon, implying that the Welsh Government has not met the requirements of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure ... This suggests a lack of consideration for the children and young people who were representing Funky Dragon on the Grand Council as well as all the children and young people who have offered their time, energy and commitment to representing Funky Dragon over the past 12 years.

In the eyes of those who were affected, the allocation in 2014 of Welsh Government funding for consultation with children and young people, as part of a larger grant to Children in Wales, did not adequately address the gap that would be left when the Grand Council was disbanded. It felt like the end of a promising beginning for children, young people and democracy in Wales.

¹⁸ Record of Proceedings, National Assembly for Wales 22.05.2013

Reflecting and Re-grouping

With no offices and no staff, the trustees of Funky Dragon had to decide what to do next. At this stage, they found a crucial friend in Youth Cymru, Wales' national youth work charity, whose trustees agreed to provide a postal address and basic office facilities, since the board was otherwise 'homeless'. The company's accountants, Bevan and Buckland, also provided help in dealing with the financial business that now fell to the voluntary trustees. With this help and with the determination of all the professional and young trustees, the board managed to continue to meet. They reflected, regrouped and developed a new focus.

Aside from voicing their protest at the process which resulted in the cessation of the Grand Council ¹⁹, dealing with office closures and staff redundancies, there was the unfinished business of the research that had been started towards a youth report in the next UK reporting round under the UNCRC, due in 2015. The data had been collected, and the trustees decided they would complete the report on a voluntary basis and try to use the dynamic of the UNCRC process to press the case for restoring a children and young people's assembly.

In addition, and in view of all that had happened, it seemed appropriate to reflect on what lessons could be learned and what kind of national parliamentary forum would now best serve children and young people in Wales. The trustees decided to commission professional help to identify a model for a new Youth Assembly for Wales, based on existing good practice. This led to the Croke Report and later, to the trustees decision to consult the public.

The Trustees set certain parameters for any new model, as follows:

- Representatives must be democratically elected at a local level by their peers from across all of Wales.
- The governance structure must support a peer-led approach, e.g. with a mix of young people and professionals as trustees.
- The structure must provide support for children and young people to speak out collectively, on issues of their choice.
- The platform must as a priority, enable children and young people to influence policy making in Wales at a national level.
- The platform must be independent and able to work with all Elected Members including Assembly Members and Members of Parliament to further children and young peoples' issues.
- The model must support children and young people in Wales to report directly to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and to be active partners in monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC in Wales.

¹⁹ P-04-597: Protect the future of Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryChronology.aspx?IId=10929&Opt=2>

Thus, in two main ways:

- a. using the dynamic of the UNCRC and
- b. building a principled and evidence-based new model

the trustees set about making the case, if not to resurrect the Dragon, then to ensure that a phoenix would rise from its ashes, in the shape of a new national youth parliament. They re-branded the company as a 'Campaign for a Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales' or 'CYPAW' and what followed was a unique and inspiring sequence of events, driven by a committed, talented and optimistic group of young volunteers who were determined that there should be a national independent democratic voice for the young people of Wales.

Whilst determined to see the job through, the trustees did not expect that in just two years' time the National Assembly for Wales would vote unanimously for a Welsh Youth Parliament, with the Presiding Officer publicly thanking them for their tireless campaigning and for 'reminding us that our duty is not only to today's voters, but to all citizens with a stake in our democracy, present and future.'²⁰

Building the Case: The Croke Report²¹

The Croke Report was based on a mixed methods approach with a literature review, a desk-based study of 17 national youth parliaments elsewhere in the world and semi-structured interviews with people involved with the youth parliaments. The study found that the role, remit and powers of youth parliaments varies in different contexts but their number has risen since the 1990s. In some countries, there is remarkable local activity: for example, a 2008 study for UNICEF found that in one district alone in Southern India there were 7,000 'children's parliaments' – one in every village. There is variation in selection or election of members, age range and operational arrangements. Young people, as well as the UN Committee,²² favour direct elections with additional arrangements to help achieve inclusivity.

Many of the youth parliaments studied had direct elections with additional places reserved for children from marginalised groups. There were innovative examples of national youth parliaments being linked to the everyday places that impact on children's lives. In Slovenia, children are included in the electoral arrangements for the national youth parliament as soon as they enter school, and space is made within the curriculum for engagement with the politics of class, school, and municipalities and upwards to the national youth parliament. There were also innovative examples of youth parliaments linking with children across a nation through progressive online platforms.

²⁰ Record of Proceedings, National Assembly for Wales 19.10.2016.

²¹ Information in this section all drawn from Croke 2015, n.2 above.

²² N. 4 above.

Most of the national youth parliaments had the same number of elected members as the relevant national adult parliament. The relationship between the youth and adult parliaments, as well as key office holders such as an ombudsperson or children's commissioner, were viewed as important factors in securing influence and impact. In some cases, members of the adult parliament played a role in training new members of the youth parliament, for example to prepare legislative proposals. Draft bills and resolutions were amongst a range of tools deployed by the youth parliaments in the sample, others being manifestos, surveys, responses to consultations, periodic sittings held in national chambers and policy committees mirroring adult parliamentary committees. The Scottish Youth Parliament argued that to add credibility and authority to young people's independent collective voice the views of as many children as possible across a nation must be collected, to determine what issues should be focused on nationally.

Many examples of influential engagement were found. All related to issues, not party politics. The Victoria Youth Parliament in Australia had seen some 20 of its draft Bills passed into law. In Belgium, the French Speaking Youth Council influenced the withdrawal of security measures targeting young people, reform on discriminatory measures in employment and unemployment, sex education programmes in schools and educational content in the broadcast media. The Cypriot Children's Parliament had called for the establishment of a children's Ombudsperson, with a positive result. The Irish Youth Parliament successfully promoted a cervical cancer vaccine programme for 12-year-old girls and changes to a periodic government survey on health behaviours of school-aged children. The Scottish Youth Parliament had lobbied successfully on reforms on equal marriage, national living wage and votes at 16.

Some youth parliaments engaged in monitoring and reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The methods and depth of engagement varied in the Youth Parliaments that reported to the Committee, according to factors such as available resource to support children's research, but in each case there was evidence of opportunity for dynamic engagement at community, local and national levels as well as with the UN Committee.

From these examples, Croke concluded that the relationships between the youth parliament and key decision makers were very important. Regular contact with Members of Parliament, government officials, Children's Commissioners etc. helped to ensure access to the corridors of power, to focus campaigning and exert maximum influence. Another crucial element was credibility: the youth parliament needed to be able to demonstrate engagement with children and young people nation-wide and develop a strong evidence base. Ideally, this should be done by using a systematic approach to policy advocacy grounded in the dynamic framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Croke Report concluded that it is critical to the success of a youth parliament that it plays a legislative and policy-impacting role and not just a symbolic one: young people should be not only heard, but taken seriously and their recommendations acted upon through genuine engagement with adult decision-makers and power-brokers. To achieve this in Wales, and learning from the experience of the Funky Dragon years, a new youth parliament for Wales should be in the 'right place', on the parliamentary side of the country's constitutional structures, and should be a protected by law as a permanent body.

The UK State Party Reporting Process 2015-16

Alongside commissioning the Croke Report, work continued to complete the youth report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the 5th periodic examination of the UK State Party. The report, *FUNC+*, contained analysis and recommendations based on data collected before October 2014.²³ The issues spanned education and training, access to information, safety and protection from harm, participation, rights awareness and discrimination. In addition, the report contained a statement about the cessation of the Grand Council's functions and a request that the UN Committee make a clear recommendation that Wales should establish with urgency a national, independent and democratically elected representative Youth Assembly. A supplementary report, *Participate!*, submitted by the young trustees to the UN Committee for the State Party hearing in May 2016, provided additional evidence of the need for improved participation structures around Wales.²⁴

Three trustees – aged 17, 20 and 58, attended before the Committee at its pre-session hearing in October 2015 and at the State Party hearings in May 2016. Matt Walker, aged 17, attended the under-18s hearing where he also represented the children's research report, *Little Voices Shouting Out* that had been completed following transfer of the project to the Observatory.²⁵ The trustees were delighted when the Committee's Concluding Observations included the recommendation they sought.

After weeks of personally collecting data from hundreds of young people and writing our initial FUNC+ report, we flew to Geneva to make our case to the Committee. In their concluding observations the committee called for the establishment of youth parliaments in all nations and overseas territories of the UK - the first big victory in our campaign!
(Matt Walker, speaking at the National Assembly for Wales, February 2017.
<http://www.yourassembly.org/cypaw-consultation-launch/>)

²³ *FUNC+* : Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child by the CYPAW

²⁴ *Participate!*: Supplementary Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child by the CYPAW. These and other alternative reports can be accessed at the UN Committee's web pages for the 72nd session; n. 13 above.

²⁵ *Little Voices Shouting Out Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*, Observatory on Children's Human Rights, 2015.

The engagement of the young people with the UN Committee's process helped to inform the Committee about the realities of children's rights in Wales from the perspective of the young. So informed, the Committee was better able to interrogate the UK delegations to Geneva and formulate recommendations that would support the Campaign. In their 2008 Concluding Observations, the Committee had commended the Welsh Government for its support for Funky Dragon. In 2016 the Committee regretted Funky Dragon's passing and urged the establishment of a youth parliament. On each occasion, the message was clear: such a structure is a vital part of implementation of children's human rights.

The UN Committee's Concluding Observations in June 2016 sent a clear message back to the UK and specifically to Wales that the key duty bearers needed to think again about a youth parliament.²⁶



The CYPAW Consultation

Informed by the Croke Report, the trustees worked with its author to produce a summary and a consultation document setting out their vision for a new Welsh Youth Parliament. The essential elements of their proposals were that it should:

- be protected by law;
- be young people led and independent of party politics;
- be elected by peers of its Members via Assembly constituencies (and e-voting should be explored);
- work in partnership with Assembly Members;
- have the same number of elected representatives as adult elected members;
- allow as Members young people between the 11 and 25 years;
- have places reserved for minority groups;
- have a Members' term of office of not less than 2 years;
- hold no less than 4 meetings per year with opportunities for virtual meetings to be explored and live streaming of plenary meetings;
- be involved in scrutiny of Welsh Government;

²⁶ Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. CRC/C/GBR/CO/5.

- be involved in the drafting of mock bills to be debated in plenary and formally responded to by Welsh Government;
- enable all children in Wales to be involved in the selection of issues on which it would campaign;
- have clear links with national and local structures such as schools, youth clubs, youth forums etc.;
- engage in monitoring and reporting on children's human rights, reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and monitoring Welsh Government's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CYPAW's remarkable, youth-led public consultation, *Assemble for the Future*, was launched on June 15 2016, in pouring rain on the steps of the Senedd.



The launch was one week before the EU referendum result: a referendum in which no Welsh children were consulted or given accessible information regarding a decision that would have far reaching implications for all of their futures. The CYPWA trustees did their best to promote media interest in the consultation launch, but were exasperated that in between headlines about 'the EU', 'the Euros' and even 'Voles', there was no coverage. As one young trustee put it,

we constantly hear in the press about disengaged and politically disaffected young people, but young people are not asked for their views on the EU referendum and the perception instead is that young people are more engaged with football than politics and to top it off one of the headline stories is about "Voles"..... nobody has reported on our positive news story about a group of committed young people who are campaigning for a democratically elected voice for the young people of Wales and desperately want all young people to have the opportunity to engage and influence local, national and global politics. (Jack Gillum, trustee, speaking at the consultation launch, June 2016)

On a more positive note, as part of the launch of this report CYPWA were able to cite the UN Committee's 2016 Concluding Observation recommending that the UK State Party:

Expedite the establishment of Youth Parliaments in all devolved administrations and territories as permanent fora for children's effective engagement with national legislative processes on issues that affect them. ²⁷

²⁷ N.25 above.

Also very positive was the reception of the launch by Members of the National Assembly for Wales. All who came, from each of the political parties represented in the National Assembly, pledged their commitment to supporting the development of a new Youth Parliament for Wales.

The trustees promoted the consultation online and so far as possible through community and local groups. They organized a stall at the Royal Welsh Show, shared with the Observatory on Children's Human Rights. There, in contrast to the Senedd launch, the sun shone gloriously, matched by the warmth of reception by the majority of visitors to the stall, including VIPs like the Welsh Minister for Children, Carl Sargeant AM. The Minister took the opportunity to make clear that neither he nor the Welsh Government would be adverse to a new Welsh Youth Parliament, but that it would be for the Assembly – the parliament in the Welsh constitution – to take this forward. This was an important and affirming validation of the Campaign's position, much valued by the young trustees to whom the Minister spoke on that day.

The consultation responses showed overwhelming support for a Welsh Youth Parliament, with 92% of respondents in favour and 85% wishing to see it as a permanent body and protected in law.

One response from a young person from Rhondda Cynon Taff, put the case simply and powerfully:

It only makes sense to have a youth assembly and to have one protected by law. It encourages younger generations to become more politically active – getting their voices heard, instead of being drowned out in the noise.



The Welsh Youth Parliament

By the time of the Assemble for Wales consultation, the Campaign had already begun to engage directly with Dame Rosemary Butler, the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales. Dame Rosemary had reached out to the CYPAW young trustees and invited them to discussions at the Senedd early in 2016. She went on to secure in the legacy report on the fourth Assembly (2011 – 2016) a recommendation that the next Assembly should consider the case for a formal youth parliament. This commitment was taken up with vigour by her successor, Elin Jones AM, the Presiding Officer for the fifth National Assembly for Wales.

In October 2016, Elin Jones AM presided over a debate in the National Assembly for Wales in which speakers from all parties recognized the importance of the participation rights of young people, the status of the UNCRC in Welsh law and the benefits of a youth parliament.

The result of the debate was a unanimous vote in favour of establishing a Youth Parliament for Wales. The young CYPAW trustees watched the debate from the public viewing gallery and were moved to tears, realizing in that moment that they had won their two year battle. The Campaign was explicitly acknowledged by the Presiding Officer when concluding the debate, when she stated:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the trustees of the Campaign for the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, and the campaigners, for their dedication to their cause. For two years now they have campaigned tirelessly for the establishment of a youth assembly, building an outstanding body of research and evidence that will help us to drive our ambition forward. Thank you for reminding us that our duty is not only to today's voters, but to all citizens with a stake in our democracy, present and future. If the Assembly votes in favour of this motion today, it will give the Commission a clear mandate to make progress on the details to establish, in the near future, the first youth parliament for Wales.

In the new year of 2017, the full findings of CYPAW's consultation were released, evidencing overwhelming support for a new Youth Parliament that supported the main elements of CYPAW's vision. During the launch of the Consultation Response at the Senedd, with great symbolism, the Presiding Officer invited the CYPAW Trustees into the debating chamber.



Subsequently, the young trustees became and continue to be members of the Presiding Officer's steering group to help guide the process of convening the first 'proper' youth parliament for Wales. This steered a process towards the Presiding Officer's public consultation on a Youth Parliament, fully resourced by the National Assembly's Commission and retaining the essential elements of CYPAW's vision.



Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Looking back

Why did the Campaign succeed? And why did it succeed so quickly? Looking back, in October 2014 the trustees would not have imagined it to be possible. On reflection, certain factors appear to have been especially important.

First, team work was important. The board of trustees was mixed in age and experience. The young trustees were all former Grand Council members who had experience of doing research, making recommendations and meeting with decision-makers.

During the Campaign years, they grew to be experts themselves, so that by the end, the distinction between the 'young' and 'professional' trustees had practically disappeared. The 'professional' trustees included people with experience of politics, management, research and law. By the end of the Campaign, whatever their starting point, all the trustees had gained skills and competences, but most importantly, they had acted as a team of equal partners. It was neither a case of 'adults helping children' nor of 'children in charge', just people working together in common cause.

Second, the dynamic of the UNCRC reporting process was important. At a time when the voices of the trustees and the interests they represented were not being listened to at the national level, they were listened to in the UN human rights process. This is an important illustration of what international human rights systems are for. The trustees knew about the dynamic of the UNCRC because of the prior experience of the OROS report and the way it had been received by the UN Committee in the 2008 reporting round. The trustees were fortunate to have data that had been recently collected, which they were able to analyse and write up in the *FUNC+* report. Between them, they had knowledge and skills which enabled them to engage tactically and responsively with the UN process, including by conducting the supplementary *Participate!* report and by deploying the 2016 Concluding Observations at the beginning of their public consultation. They were fortunate also to have had sufficient funds left to be able to send representatives to key meetings in Wales, London and Geneva during the 2015/16 reporting round.

Third, it was important that the trustees were able to commission the Croke Report. This helped make an evidence-based case and to produce robust, well-argued proposals to put forward for public consultation. Professional expertise and advanced research skills are often needed to make a robust case, alongside and complementary to proper representation of children and young people's experiences and opinions. The Croke Report's detailed comparison with other countries helped both to build the case for the Welsh Youth Parliament in principle and to justify the detailed proposals put forward in *Assemble for Wales*.

Fourth, allies were extremely important. Most important was the support of the two Presiding Officers of the National Assembly for Wales, Dame Rosemary Butler and Elin Jones, and their staff. From the early autumn of 2016 it was clear that they wanted to work with CYPAW towards a Welsh Youth Parliament. The Assembly's plenary debate in October 2016 was the tipping point at which it was clear the argument in principle had been won. Other allies included the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Professor Sally Holland, who pressed the case during the UN process and in her own discussions with senior Welsh political figures.

Some personal reflections

Looking back on the Campaign, chair of the board, Matt Walker said:

... I started this journey as part of Funky Dragon, an organisation set up to influence decisions made in Wales. This journey has brought me to this point and demonstrated just how young people can be active agents in challenging decisions. I am immensely proud of everything we've achieved for the young people of Wales and the huge change we've helped bring.."

The trustees asked former Grand Council members via Facebook to look back and say what they gained from the experience. Here are some typical examples of what they said:



Looking ahead

As they approach the end of their formal role, the trustees of CYPAW are delighted that elections are imminent for the first Welsh Youth Parliament, and that many elements of their vision are included in the National Assembly for Wales' proposals for how the Welsh Youth Parliament should operate.

Their hopes for the future are that this Welsh Youth Parliament will be:

- as soon as practicable, provided for by law, with children's human rights at the core of its operation;
- representative, encouraging involvement of children across Wales, no matter their age, disability, socio-economic, cultural background or other status;
- developmental of its members as individuals, enabling them to engage with human rights duty bearers and decision-makers and them hold accountable;
- supportive of meaningful participation so that children's views are not only heard but taken into account;
- able to make links between national and local activities and activism, for example in schools, youth clubs, youth forums and community groups;
- designed and led by young people and independent of party politics;
- engaged with the dynamic of the UNCRC;
- able to ensure training for young elected members including on research and how to create evidence-based recommendations;
- working jointly and engaging with the elected members of the National Assembly for Wales, co-producing progressive, human rights-realising laws, policies and practices and collaborating in public scrutiny.

The trustees hope that the thousands of people who were in some way involved or touched by the story told in this Report will, like them, look back with pride, and look forward with excitement and renewed commitment to the Welsh Youth Parliament.