**Minimum voting age for Assembly elections submitted to National Assembly for Wales Commission.**

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales for children and young people’s issues, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together. One of our core aims is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a reality in Wales. Children in Wales campaigns for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, with special attention for children in need and works to ensure children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them.

For further information on the work of Children in Wales, please see [www.childreninwales.org.uk](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk) and [www.youngwales.wales](http://www.youngwales.wales)

Children in Wales works closely with its member organisations and has established working relationships with the Welsh Government and other funders. A key role for our organisations is to maintain a constructive flow of information between those working to develop policy and legislation and those working directly with children and young people. Our conference and extensive training programme, together with the forums and networks that are supported or managed by Children in Wales, serve as a means for ensuring that our members and Welsh Government officials are kept informed of current and evolving developments in the field, and that these developments help shape policies and enhance practice. Children in Wales membership covers a vast array of organisation who work to improve the lives of children in Wales and includes voluntary/third sector organisations, professional associations, local authorities and health bodies, as well as many smaller community groups, schools and individual members. At the time of writing, there are over 260 members

Young Wales is a programme of work that aims to ensure that Children and young peoples’ voices, and views are heard by decision makers locally and nationally. The young wales team worked with over 1000 young people during the last year.

**Our Response**

One of the programmes of work that Young Wales has supported and developed in Wales is work developed by the British Youth Council, which enabled young people to get involved in the UK Youth Parliament, an annual programme of work which encourages young people to get involved in and gain understanding of the democratic process, and culminates in a young people’s debate day in the House of Commons in London. The issue of votes at 16 was identified as one of the issues to be discussed in the annual sitting in Parliament, held in November 2016. In Wales over 3000 young people from all across the Principality voted to debate this issue, with the resulting debate highlighting the inequalities identified below.

Through our contacts with young people we are aware of their recent frustration at being unable to vote in the referendum on exiting the European Union and also in the recent election. Young people report feeling very frustrated that they are unable to vote, and thus denied the opportunity to influence politicians who are making decisions that will affect their lives. In addition to the Brexit decision, other recently decisions that will have a significant impact on young people such as tuition fees and the living wage, have been made without the views of 16 and 17 year old being considered.

In discussing this consultation with young people, the Young Wales Project Board (YPPB) members were unanimous in their opinions that young people should have the opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives. Currently 16 and 17 year olds are denied the chance to influence decisions made by politicians about issues that impact them directly. Young people's concerns on issues like and youth service cuts are often not canvassed or their views ignored.

There is a generation of 16 and 17 year-olds emerging from the education system that are well equipped to engage and participate in all elections across the UK. Every 16 year-old receiving school education will have been engaged in a curriculum that includes discussions on citizenship and about the political process and democracy. Young people have clearly told Young Wales staff that they want to vote, and want to be actively engaged, we should therefore give them the opportunity.

As the Scottish Government took positive steps towards a more inclusive and political system when they passed the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill, which allows all 16 and 17 year olds to vote in all Scottish elections from May 2016. Young Wales Project Board members believe that allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in selected parts of the UK and not others is unjustified, and would urge Welsh Government to address this issue. Young people's participation in the Scottish Referendum demonstrates that they are eager to engage. 75% of 16 and 17 year olds turned out to vote in once in a lifetime opportunity to have their say in shaping the future of their country. Other young people across the UK should have the same democratic right.  
  
In discussion this issue with young people in Wales, they identified what they perceive as the unfairness of the current situation. Currently 16 year olds are legally permitted to:

* Give full consent to medical treatment
* Pay income tax and National Insurance
* Obtain tax credits and welfare benefits in their own right
* Consent to sexual relationships
* Get married or enter a civil partnership, with parental consent
* Change their name by deed poll
* Become a director of a company
* Serve in the armed forces but not deployed on the front line

As one young person told us – “at 16 I can legally sleep with an MP but I am not allowed to vote for them”

From the evidence gathered from young people in Wales, many young people are very interested in politics, and want to be active citizens. However young people believe that the potential gap between currently being able to vote at 18, and the reality of possibly not voting until they are in their early 20s, when they may be working away from their family home or have a young family of their own, contributes to political disengagement.