

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

5 November 2020

Authors:

***Littering and Plastic Waste Committee,
Welsh Youth Parliament***

**WELSH
YOUTH
PARLIAMENT**

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BACKGROUND

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT TIME FOR US AS A WELSH YOUTH PARLIAMENT, AS WE SEE THE CONCLUSION OF OUR WORK REPRESENTING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND THE LAUNCH OF OUR COMMITTEE REPORT ON REDUCING LITTER AND PLASTIC WASTE.

This is our third and final report as the first Members of the Welsh Youth Parliament, following our work on Emotional and Mental Health Support, and Life Skills in the Curriculum.

The Welsh Youth Parliament's first election was held in November 2018. This election gave 11-18 year olds the opportunity to elect young people that would be their voice across the whole of Wales. 60 Members were elected, with 40 representing constituencies, and 20 elected through 13 partner organisations working with a wide range of young people in Wales.

“The youth parliament will give Wales’s young people a democratic voice at a national level and empower them to bring about change” (Elin Jones MS, Llywydd of the Senedd).

Nearly 2,000 young people from across Wales took part in a survey to tell us what they wanted us to prioritise. At our first full meeting in February 2019, following passionate speeches by all in the Chamber on a range of topics, we chose Littering and Plastic Waste, Life Skills in the Curriculum and Emotional and Mental Health Support as the main topics we would focus on.

The importance of tackling littering and plastic waste for young people in Wales is highlighted by Efan Fairclough, Member of the Welsh Youth Parliament's Littering and Plastic Waste Committee:

“We may be in a situation where there is more plastic in the sea than fish by 2050. That is not a situation that we can allow to happen. We have the ability and potential as a country to make a difference to our generation and to future generations.”



THE PROBLEM WITH LITTERING AND PLASTIC WASTE

“We must take the lead in saving the environment, which requires urgent attention.” (Rhian Shillabeer, Welsh Youth Parliament Member for South Cardiff and Penarth)

We know through personal experience, and having spoken with other young people in our local areas, how passionately young people feel about the environment and the harm caused by littering and plastic waste.

“At the start of secondary school, I got a grasp on just how big the issue of plastic waste was; in school, at home, everywhere and I could see the devastating effects of plastic on the environment.” (Ubayedhur Rahman, WYPM)

There are millions of tonnes of non-biodegradable plastic pollution in our oceans, endangering the wildlife of those oceans and causing micro and nanoplastics to seep into the food chain (Senedd Cymru Report, 2019). The link between plastic pollution and the wider topic of climate change is highlighted in a recent report by the Centre for International Environmental Law, “At current levels, greenhouse gas emissions from the plastic lifecycle threaten the ability of the global community to keep global temperature rise below 1.5C.” (May 2019).

In Wales, we can be proud that we are a country that is seen as a pioneer in the fight against plastic waste. Wales was the first country in the UK to charge for single-use carrier bags, and recycling rates for plastic bottles have reached 75% (WRAP Cymru). Household recycling rates in Wales are the highest in the UK and already the third highest in the world. But despite the positive work, recent research by WRAP Cymru estimates that 400,000 tonnes of plastic waste is produced in Wales each year, and items that could be regularly recycled are put in the waste bin rather than the recycling bin.

In June 2019, the Welsh Parliament’s Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee called for changes to reduce pollution and the use of plastic. In January 2020, the Welsh Government put forward suggestions aimed at a ‘zero-waste future by 2050’. Some other methods of reducing litter and plastic waste have been set out in the UK Environment Bill provisions for Wales, including Extended Producer Responsibility (which calls producers to account for their plastic production) and the Deposit Return Schemes (where households will receive a small financial gain for returning single-use plastics to a collection point).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to new challenges. A report by Keep Wales Tidy shows fewer bin collections and litter-picking activities during lockdown, . As the lockdown relaxed over the summer, there was an increase in litter, including Personal Protective Equipment (which for valid reasons, includes disposable plastic).

OUR RESEARCH

AS A COMMITTEE, WE ARE VERY KEEN THAT OUR WORK LEADS TO PRACTICAL ACTION TO RESPOND TO THE PROBLEM OF LITTERING AND PLASTIC WASTE.

To take the first step, we needed to get a clear picture of young people's habits and attitudes towards the need to recycle, reuse and reduce our waste and plastic consumption, and if young people have the facilities they need to reduce, reuse and recycle where they learn and socialise.

We spoke with experts and campaigners before we planned our consultation. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we, like many others, had to change our initial plans and work and engage virtually. We also felt that it was important we use our role as Welsh Youth Parliament Members (WYPMs) to provide support and positive messages to young people across Wales while continuing our consultation work and sharing of good practice. As a result, we have:

- **Published blogs and vlogs encouraging young people to appreciate their environment and suggest practical ideas for recycling, reusing, and reducing;**
- **Encouraged children and young people to take part in our online survey. 560 responses were collected between 9 April and 14 August 2020.**
- **Provided opportunities for young people to participate in virtual workshops and discussion sessions.**
- **Discussed littering and plastic waste with Hannah Blythyn MS, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government.**
- **Discussed with the First Minister our experiences of being young people living in a pandemic.**
- **Heard from teachers and organisations specialising in education and environmental issues to feed into our research.**

We hope that this report, informed and written by young people, will help bring about change in Wales that will make littering and plastic waste a thing of the past, and help lead to improvements to protect the environment for future generations.

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to take part in our consultation.





THE NEED FOR ACTION

AT THE START OF OUR SURVEY, WE WANTED TO FIND OUT HOW YOUNG PEOPLE FELT ABOUT REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC WASTE IN GENERAL AND IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THEIR DAILY LIVES; AT HOME, WHERE THEY LEARN, OR OUT WITH FRIENDS.

WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S FEELINGS TOWARDS LITTERING AND PLASTIC WASTE?

Our survey results show that 87% think that reducing, reusing and recycling waste is important to them. A high percentage agree that it is important to reduce, reuse and recycle litter and plastic waste at home (87%), when out with family or friends (84%), and at school (84%). 85% are confident that they know what they can recycle. 67% of young people know of other ways to reduce littering and plastic waste aside from recycling.

38% would choose items with less packaging, and 12% would make a complaint or shop somewhere else if a company/organisation did not handle its waste responsibly. We also saw in written responses to our survey that young people want to see shops and producers doing more to respond to the situation. There is reference to the need to reduce packaging, for more shops to offer refilling stations and the use of biodegradable packaging.

In our survey, we found that around two-thirds want to see some kind of ban on single-use plastic, (67.5% of responses in favour of a ban from one or more public places, 6% disagreeing, and 29% of respondents unsure), and over half felt that items containing single-use plastic should be more expensive (51%).

WHO INFLUENCES YOUNG PEOPLE?

93% of young people chose Parents, carers or family members as one of the three main influences on their awareness of the need to reduce, reuse and recycle. Second were Teachers (55%), and Influencers such as David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg third (42%).

When discussing how young people would like to receive information and learn about reducing litter and plastic waste in general, Lessons at school from our teachers came top of the list. 71% chose this option as one of their top three. Second was Presentations by an expert in the field visiting your school/college, with 48%. In joint third were TV advertising and Social media advertising with 46%.

Alongside the support for lessons at school from their teachers, 86% of young people surveyed agree that reducing, reusing and recycling should be taught as part of their education.

CONCLUSIONS

WE WELCOME THE FACT THAT THE YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEYED COULD SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING WASTE, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT THIS CONSULTATION TOOK PLACE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

It was also encouraging that so many felt confident about how to recycle, although our findings showed that fewer young people know about ways of reducing littering and plastic waste other than recycling. We feel that more needs to be done to educate young people about the other actions that can be taken to reduce littering and plastic waste.

“I truly believe education is extremely important and is the main way we can inspire the younger generations to be more eco-friendly.” Anwen Rodaway (WYPM)

We agree with the 86% that feel as we do, that reducing, reusing and recycling should be taught as part of our education. We want to see more of a focus on educating young people in the classroom. The aim of “supporting learners to become ethical, informed citizens who show a commitment to, and recognise their dependence on, the sustainability of the planet” (Curriculum and Assessment Bill (Wales), September 2020) is very relevant to our hopes of reducing littering and plastic waste. As a Youth Parliament, we want to make sure that the amount of teaching on the negative impact of littering and plastic waste and the actions that young people can take to help solve the problem.

We are pleased to see that parents, carers and family members have such a strong influence on young people’s awareness of the need to reduce, reuse and recycle. We’d feel that it’s important to build on this by ensuring that parents and carers are given accurate information about recycling to make choices that will reduce waste.

We welcomed the opportunity to take part in the Welsh Government’s consultation on ‘Reducing single use plastic in Wales’, which considers banning certain single-use plastic items. Our consultation shows that young people are ready for change, with the majority keen to see Government take action taken to reduce single-use plastic by banning and/or increasing the price of relevant items.

“forcing shops to reduce plastic on everything and banning plastic on beaches and in parks, and placing recycling bins next to every public litter bin.” (10-year old girl, Cardiff)

The fact that such a small number of young people said that they would complain, or change where they shop (12%) if a company/organisation did not handle its waste responsibly, is worrying. Based on our own experiences and the discussions we as Members had with young people in our communities, we feel that one of the main reasons for the low figure is that young people are disappointed by the response to campaigns like the global climate strike that attracted national and international attention. Another factor is frustration at feeling that young people cannot bring about change in where we learn, and in our local areas.

“The sad reality is that young people feel powerless.” (Evan Burgess, WYPM Aberconwy)

It is clear that much more needs to be done to educate young people about the choices they can make, increase their confidence to speak up, express opinions, complain where necessary and to demonstrate that there is real value in engaging in the democratic process, both locally and nationally. In 2011, Wales was the first country to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child part of its law. Article 12 of the Convention notes the right of children and young people to voice opinions on all issues that affect them and for that opinion to be taken seriously. More recently, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) refers to seven well-being goals, including Wales making a contribution to global well-being. The Act also states the importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals as one of its five ways of working. We are calling for a review of the role that young people across Wales play in discussions and decision-making at a local level, especially via Public Service Boards.

Young people expect that the different groups and forums that exist to discuss and make decisions affecting their local areas are well connected. We want this review to look at how to improve young people’s involvement in the decision-making process. We hope that this will also mean that young people see that taking part in discussions that impact them and their local area is worthwhile, and ensure that young people’s priorities influence decisions that affect them and their communities.



A group of young people are seated around a table in a meeting room, engaged in a discussion. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent pink filter and various white geometric shapes like triangles, squares, circles, and lines. The text is prominently displayed in the center-left area.

PROVISION

IN THIS SECTION, WE LOOK AT THE FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S RECYCLING AND REUSE HABITS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. OUR RESEARCH SHOWED THAT 70% REUSE ITEMS SUCH AS CONTAINERS WITH LIDS, PLASTIC BOTTLES, AND BAGS, WITH 61% USING WATER FOUNTAINS, AND 52% USING REUSABLE WATER BOTTLES.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Our survey findings show that the type of materials young people were currently able to recycle where they receive their education varied. While 92% of young people told us they are able to recycle paper; around two-thirds said they were able to recycle drinks cans, and cartons; and just over half could recycle food waste at their place of learning.

Young people told us they wanted to be able to recycle a much wider variety of items at in places likes schools and college, such as felt pens, clothing, drinks cans and cartons, and food waste.

55% of the young people surveyed have an eco-council or eco-committee at their place of education. 65% of those surveyed believe that an eco-council/committee is an effective way of raising awareness about reducing, reusing and recycling litter and plastic waste. Over half (56%) agree that eco-councils should be compulsory in our schools. This view is supported by the teachers we spoke with.

There are examples of active eco-committees/eco-councils that have organised recycling bins for schools, crisp packet collections in schools and in the community and clothes bank collections to raise money for schools by recycling clothes/textiles.

“In our school, we have introduced reusable water bottles with the school logo on to help reduce single use plastic .” Brengain Glyn (WYPM, Arfon).

In discussing the future, several teachers who spoke to us want to see more support for eco-committees/eco-councils. Having more time to meet and the ability to access resources is needed to make a difference.

“The local authority needs to provide the school with greater recycling facilities and link with the committee to see what the school requires.” (A secondary school teacher who took part in the consultation)

IN THE COMMUNITY

We asked young people what they recycled at home, or while they are in their local area. Around 90% of young people recycle plastic bottles, and almost 80% recycle drinks cans, but less than half of the young people surveyed recycle other items such as packaging trays, plastic pots, paper, cardboard, food waste, glass, and clothing. Only 20% of young people recycle their clothes.

Young people also told us that more facilities for recycling or reducing litter and plastic waste are needed in their community. Only 41% of those surveyed felt that there are enough litter bins, while over 68% said that there aren't enough recycling bins. 67% of young people told us that there aren't enough water refill fountains.

CONCLUSIONS

THE CLASSROOMS IS AN IMPORTANT PLACE TO EDUCATE YOUNG PEOPLE, AND IN SETTING A POSITIVE EXAMPLE TO ENCOURAGE GOOD HABITS FROM A YOUNG AGE.

Although we are pleased that there are opportunities to recycle some items, it's disappointing that so many young people are unable to recycle food waste, food and drink packaging and other materials where they receive their education.

**“It would be good to be able to recycle more packaging and waste from the canteen but it's difficult as the canteen is run by an outside company. Bins are often overflowing and it would be good to try outdoor recycling bins.”
(A secondary school teacher that took part in our consultation)**

It is clear that, currently, our places of learning do not have the facilities they need to dispose of a variety of materials sustainably. Control over some of these issues does not lie with individual schools or colleges, but with Local Authorities. We are aware of some good examples such as Monmouthshire Council changing from single-use plastic milk bottles to reusable glass bottles, but the situation varies across different parts of Wales. As a Committee, we call on Local Authorities to look at how places of learning can be supported to act more sustainably, and ask the Welsh Government to consider ways of to make sure there is more consistency across Wales.

The Future Generations Report 2020 suggests that all public bodies and boards covered by the Future Generations Act (including the Welsh Government) should 'review their procurement approach and activities to identify opportunities to maximise the social, economic, environmental and cultural impact of spending decisions'. We welcome the Commissioner's work in this area, and agree with the need to ensure that procurement frameworks support efforts to reduce plastic waste.

We agree with young people and teachers who told us that eco-councils and eco-committees are a good way of raising awareness of reducing, reusing and recycling litter and plastic waste, and are keen to see them at work in more schools across Wales.

During the consultation we have learnt more about the need to consider sustainability in our use of many items. We have become far more aware of the effect clothing has on the issue of plastic pollution as microplastics from synthetic fibres, often found in fast fashion, are washed into our seas. This is one of the areas which we feel awareness needs be raised further.

“Recycling plastic bottles we talk about more than other types of plastic and that has an influence. When it comes to recycling clothing, which wasn't that high compared to plastic bottles, we don't talk about the need to recycle clothing that much.” Ffion-Haf Davies (WYPM Gower)

We're encouraged by the number of young people who recycle items such as plastic bottles, but believe more needs to be done to raise young people's awareness of the variety of things that they can recycle.

“When you think things like paper, cardboard, tins, glass are all easy to recycle... the fact that these are, generally not being recycled, this is actually a pretty significant problem.” (Aled Joseph, WYPM Caerphilly)

From our consultation work, we have found that action needs to be taken to tackle littering and plastic waste in the short-term and to move forward with strategies to root out the problem in the long-term. As a Committee, we are calling for better provision of bins, recycling bins and water refill fountains in public areas across Wales. We are also keen to see the Welsh Government put in place measures to ban single-use plastic products, and develop an effective plan for Extended Producer Responsibility, and Deposit Return Schemes.





RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01.** A greater emphasis on educating all young people across Wales on the negative effects of littering and plastic waste, and how young people can help to tackle these issues.
- 02.** Ensure that suitable information is available, and is well promoted to parents and families. Long-term campaigns need to raise awareness of sustainability including information on the variety of materials that can be recycled
- 03.** Give all education institutions the facilities they need so that a wider range of materials can be recycled, and to significantly reduce the amount of single-use plastic being used. We hope this would also see young people form good habits at an early age.
- 04.** We want to see eco-councils and eco-committees in action in more schools across Wales, to help drive change and raise awareness and understanding.
- 05.** Local Authorities should look at ways that places like schools, and colleges across Wales can be supported and incentivised to operate more sustainably, building on examples of good practice.
- 06.** Local Authorities to review their procurement process to make sure that the criteria in place to select suppliers reflects environmental and other well-being objectives, to maximise opportunities for education institutions to support the delivery of sustainability targets.
- 07.** We call on the Welsh Government to make sure that existing youth participation mechanisms work effectively, to give young people a voice on issues which affect them, including littering and plastic waste.
- 08.** The Welsh Government should review how existing youth participation mechanisms connect with other local decision-making forums such as Public Service Boards. It's essential that young people play an active role in local decision-making, so the Welsh Government should consider making it a legal duty for public bodies such as Local Authorities to listen to children and young people.
- 09.** There should be an increase in the number of bins, recycling bins, and refill stations, in public spaces across the country.
- 10.** We want to see Welsh Government take significant action quickly to end the production of single-use plastics (with some essential exceptions), and consider approaches such as banning the production of single-use plastics, Extended Producer Responsibility, and/or Deposit Return Schemes. The Welsh Government should consider bringing forward policy change or legislation on this matter with urgency, early in the next Senedd if such change isn't possible before the next Senedd Election in May 2021.



Life Skills in the Community
Finance, Politics and Governance
Group 1: Finance, Politics and Governance
Group 2: Finance, Politics and Governance
Group 3: Finance, Politics and Governance
Group 4: Finance, Politics and Governance

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ORGANISATIONS

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Anglesey AONB
Little Voices
Gwynedd Council Ynys Blastig
(Plastic Island) project
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Ysgol Bro Dinefwr

Ysgol Bro Myrddin

Ysgol Gyfun Bryn Tawe

Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr

Ysgol Glan Clwyd

Ysgol Maesydderwen

Ysgol Pendalar

Ysgol Tryfan

St Joseph's Roman Catholic
Comprehensive School

