

## Academi Heddwch Cymru / Wales Peace Institute

This paper summarises responses to a public consultation<sup>1</sup> initiated by the Petitions Committee in October 2011 in response to a petition supporting the creation of a Wales Peace Institute (full title above). The Petitions Committee had asked<sup>2</sup> the All Party Group on Human Rights to analyse the 81 pages of 75 closely worded responses but, as this All Party Group on Human Rights and Peace now exists, it is fitting that this new cross-party group responds to this request.

### Background

Ideas for an Academi/Institute were debated at a gathering in June 2009 in Aberystwyth of religious, peace and other interested societies. The broadsheet summarises these ideas and has been widely circulated during the campaign that then followed - supported by these organisations and 'sponsored' by four AMs: Bethan Jenkins, Michael German, Christine Chapman and Nick Ramsay. A petition to this National Assembly collected 1525 signatures within one month (by hand! - not as an e-petition) and was presented on 28 October 2009<sup>3</sup>. It reads:

**We call on the National Assembly for Wales to investigate the potential and practicality of Wales having a Peace Institute concerned with Peace and Human Rights comparable with those supported by state governments in Flanders, Catalonia and elsewhere in Europe”.**

On 23 February 2010<sup>4</sup> the Petitions Committee heard the petitioners and took evidence from Peace Institute in Flanders<sup>5</sup>. On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010 there was a video link to the Peace Institute in Catalonia<sup>6</sup> and the Frankfurt Peace Institute submitted a written paper<sup>7</sup>. Although the committee members were favourable to the concept of a Peace Institute (three of its four members were sponsors!), it proved challenging *to investigate the potential and practicality* of having a Peace Institute and the petitioners were asked suggest more specific proposals.

Following changes to the committee membership during 2010-2011, just one of the four original committee members remained in post after May 2011 and had had the benefit of hearing all the evidence. Rather than revisit evidence gathering, the new committee after May 2011 decided on a public consultation<sup>8</sup> - which then received a greater response than any previous public consultation.

Rather than undertake the analysis 'in-house', on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2012 it was decided to refer this to the All Party Group on Human Rights: The specific Minute of that meeting of the Petitions Committee reads:

Forward the petition and information gathered so far to the Cross-Party Group on Human Rights and request that the working up of a concept for the establishment of such an institution is placed on future agendas;  
Forward the consultation responses gathered to the petitioners to work up a concept in parallel and suggest that they lobby individual Members to hold a Member-led debate in Plenary on the subject.

In the event, the Cross-Party Group on Human Rights did not meet in 2012. Instead, this reconstituted All Party Group on Human Rights and Peace has taken on this task, intending to report back to the Petitions Committee. To date, the petitioners have not pursued the suggestion to lobby for a Plenary debate.

## Analysis of responses

A total of 75 responses were received, all reasonably consistent with the perspective that had been outlined in the attached broadsheet but with some of issues (naturally) receiving greater emphasis. A largest number of mentions was to the effect that its duties should be to:

*'Engage in research into issues of global security, peace, justice, human rights, and sustainable development, by liaising with universities and institutes of higher education in Wales and drawing on the experience and expertise of the teaching staff of these institutions to help us in taking on this research'.*

Many contributors put more emphasis on campaigning about the outcome of research rather than the 'research' *per se* - but all were wholly consistent with the basic premise that it had be "a truly independent institution, independent of all governments and all commercial bodies, independently funded and self-sustaining".

All who mentioned funding thought it should be "independently funded" – an issue was raised on several times during the evidence gathering and, despite repeated assurances that the petitioners did not seek financial backing, this was clearly a concern for committee members and in the First Ministers' replies.

In fact, the petitioners believe that the receipt of government funding may conflict with the independence of the Wales Peace Institute. What is requested is National Assembly support for the concept of creating an independent institution in Wales that could provide government and the people with well-researched and independent information on all such issues. It would not be a branch of the Welsh Government or the National Assembly but would be anticipated to have a close relationship with both.

As might have been expected from the fact that most respondents were from religious and/or peace organisations, many were concerned with how the results of the research would be used, notably it was said that it should:

*"Draw attention to the fact that Wales has a long and proud tradition of pacifism and devotion to the cause of peace, as exemplified by men like Waldo Williams, Henry Richard, and many others"*

*"Speak on the issues, not merely to the people of Wales, but to the whole world, and should do that by addressing itself through the international media of mass communication".*

*"Forward the content of all discussion and the text of all papers produced on these subjects to the Welsh Government".*

*"Press the Welsh Government to incorporate education in the issues mentioned into the National Curriculum for Schools in Wales ..... ensure that these vital issues are given the priority they deserve by the teaching staff of each school".*

*"Draw attention to the fact that small states, like Wales, have a role to play in exerting pressure on the world's larger states to do the right thing, in addressing the issues".*

These comments presuppose that peace and peace education is desirable in its own right and that – as in Northern Ireland – education should be biased in favour of conflict resolution. This would be wholly consistent with the appeal of

the children of Wales to the children of the world, which used to be read out at Welsh schools on St David's Day. It is not inconsistent with what many people in Wales believe to be one of our distinctive cultural features.

Supporters held a second Aberystwyth conference on 23 March this year to discuss independent funding and management of the Wales Peace Institute. The petitioners are not asking for an open-ended commitment of support (before it is decided how it is to be constituted, governed and funded) but **do hope that the National Assembly will agree to support the concept of Wales having its own Peace Institute - comparable to those existing in comparable regional states in Belgium, Spain, Germany, Finland and elsewhere in Europe.**

The petitioners and respondents are not asking for funding for (1) new University courses on peace-related issues or (2) peace campaigning. Both were made explicit in the evidence sessions and but may need reiteration. The concept of a Peace Institute is that there should be, for the benefit of government and the peace movement and the military establishment, an independent think tank with unimpeachable academic credentials able to provide detached factual analysis on matters of mutual and universal concern.

This petition has been discussed at length for over three years and been subjected to greater scrutiny than any other. It is time for a decision.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=0918>

Submissions for the Public Consultation

<sup>2</sup> Minute of meeting 24<sup>th</sup> January 2012

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-pc-home/bus-committees-third-pc-agendas.htm?ds=12%2F2009&submit=Submit>

PDF Viewer - PET(3)-15-09 : Paper 01A : Academi Heddwch Cymru / Wales Peace Institute (PDF, 101KB)

<sup>4</sup> Petitioners hearings

<sup>5</sup> Flanders hearings

<sup>6</sup> Catalonia hearings 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010 PDF Viewer - PET(3)-05-10 : Paper 1, Annex A : Evidence Session : Catalan Peace Institute

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-pc-home/bus-committees-third-pc-agendas.htm?act=dis&id=177571&ds=5/2010>

<sup>7</sup> Prof Dr Harald Müller, Director Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt, March 2009 <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-pc-home/bus-committees-third-pc-agendas.htm?act=dis&id=177571&ds=5/2010>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=0918>