The Government and Politics of Wales
Questions for discussion and case studies

Chapter 5 – The National Assembly
Pages 98–114, Author Russell Deacon

Teacher’s guide – in conjunction with the text book

Timing: Students should read the relevant chapter before undertaking the exercise questions and case studies, and discuss their answers. There are answer note suggestions behind all questions. The questions can be undertaken in class or at home with questions/answers and activities being undertaken in the classroom. The material is teaching material and NOT specifically material for answering examination questions.

Tutor guide: Tutors should familiarise themselves with the text, questions and answers before undertaking the activities in the classroom. For any unfamiliar terms an extensive glossary of key terms is provided on pages 206–22 of the book. The questions and case studies do not cover all of the material in the chapters. If tutors wish to cover this, they will need to set additional stimulus questions. Tutors and students may also wish to add material not provided in either the suggested answers or the text to the answers. Welsh politics is constantly changing, so answers provided now may well alter as these changes take place.

The questions for discussion and the case studies are found at the end of each chapter. The suggested answers and some ideas for teaching these are provided on the following pages. Tutors should seek to draw these answers from the students and also discuss their merits.

Suggested answers

Chapter 5 Questions for discussion

These questions cover some elements of the WJEC AS Government and Politics Specification 1.3.2 How the National Assembly of Wales Works – The Role and Influence of AMs.

1. In what ways are both the roles and nature of the regional (list) AMs different from those of the constituency?

Answer points: Students should note that technically, constituency and regional AMs have the same duties and responsibilities as each other. As such they have equal legal status as far as the Assembly and the relevant Wales Acts are concerned. Since the Assembly’s inception, however, the biggest differences have been that constituency AMs focus on much smaller areas and as a result tend to deal with the bulk of political activity and case work within them.
The bulk of constituency AMs are also in the governing party. Regional AMs, in contrast, normally come from the opposition, focus more on scrutinising the executive/keeping it to account and dealing with the more difficult case work that constituency AMs have not been able to deal with fully.

2. What safeguards are there in place to ensure that AMs remain ethical and honest?

Answer points: Tutors need to be aware that Welsh Assembly members’ ethics and honesty are reinforced by external and internal rules and political pressures such as party whips, constituency associations, the media and the electorate. Some of these methods are formal and others informal. The most prominent formal mechanism is that Welsh and UK politicians follow what are called the seven Nolan Principles of conduct in public life (Box 5.4). These form part of the Welsh Assembly’s Code of Conduct. Any allegations of misconduct by members in the Welsh Assembly must be reported to its own Standards Commissioner.

If an AM is found to have breached these ethical principles, they can face a series of sanctions. The Welsh Assembly’s Standards Committee also reviews procedures and seeks to ensure that they are fit for purpose. In addition ministers must follow a Ministerial Code (Box 4.7). Students should also note that ethical procedures are constantly being reviewed.

The events surrounding the death in November 2017 of Carl Sargeant AM, the former Labour cabinet minister who had been accused of sexual misconduct whilst in office, caused the Welsh government, Welsh Assembly and Welsh political parties to review their procedures with respect to the ethical issues surrounding allegations of sexual misconduct.

3. How do the political parties ensure that their AMs follow the party line both inside and outside the Assembly chamber?

Answer points: The tutor should ensure that students are aware of the answer points, the first being that the ability to follow the party line is required in order to ensure that the respective political party can follow its own political agenda or, if in government, implement its manifesto pledges. On some occasions AMs may be able to avoid being seen to dissent from the party line by arranging voting twinning with another AM (neither votes so they cancel each other’s vote out), abstaining or agreeing the position in advance with their leader/group. Sometimes this is not possible. In British politics party loyalty is always seen as being a central factor in being elected for office. AMs are therefore selected mainly on their ability to demonstrate both an ideological commitment to their party and a background of prior political service to that party. Most often this is demonstrated by serving previously in an elected post for that party either at Westminster, in local government or in the European Parliament.
Outside of the Welsh Assembly the AM’s own political party has a number of mechanisms, both formal and informal, to ensure that the AM follows the party line. If they continue to fail to follow the party line, these mechanisms can include deselection or even expulsion from the party. This does not, however, prevent them being an AM once elected. If they leave their existing political party, they must either join another one or sit as an Independent. They may have new rules to follow then.

Inside the Assembly the Chief Whip is in charge of ensuring that AMs follow the party line. If a number of AMs do not wish to do so, the party may revisit its policy or amend it to obtain the more general agreement of all members (consensus). If it is just one member who does not follow the party line, the Chief Whip and then the party leader will seek to use various methods to persuade, cajole or even threaten the member with various sanctions in order to ensure they follow the party line. This can also involve using external pressures to support them.

**Case study: differences between being an AM and an MP**

*This case study covers the WJEC AS Government and Politics Specification Element 1.3.2 How The National Assembly of Wales Works – the role and influence of AMs.*

Read the text in Box 5.1 and answer the following questions *(tutors may wish to get the students to rank their answers in order of importance and give a rationale for this to enable further discussion)*:

1. **List four ways in which AMs are like MPs.**

   The tutor should note that the case study contains full answers within it: they include the factors that they can both legislate and be part of the executive; they are elected to constituencies; they get to vote on whether legislation is passed or rejected; they represent the same forty constituencies as MPs (overlap); represent a political party; campaign on the same issues; hold constituency surgeries; and follow the same party discipline.

2. **List four differences between AMs and MPs, and give the reasons for these differences.**

   The students should be aware that there are normally no backbenchers, unlike at Westminster, because all Assembly Members are either on the government, hold a spokesperson post or serve on committees; a far greater number of AMs are also part of the Welsh government/executive, as they legislate on different policy areas; AMs are more diverse ethnically and by gender; there are twenty more AMs than MPs in Wales elected by a more proportional electoral system; and Wales operates a bilingual system of government.

   The reasons for these differences are mainly connected to the way the Assembly was established and has since evolved. It was to be a new, more modern type of
institution. The Assembly is much smaller than Westminster and the desire was for it to be a more representative institution in terms of the Welsh population/electorate.

3. Which legislature do you think is most suited to a modern democracy and give reasons for your answer?

Tutors may wish to undertake the answer to this question in the form of a Cardiff Bay vs Westminster debate and draw out the pros and cons for each. For Cardiff Bay they could include modernity (working conditions, structures), diversity, smallness and moulding to Welsh language and culture. For Westminster they could include experience and standing, greater resources, much wider range of functions, larger support structure to draw upon, and much greater public acceptance and awareness of it.

Summary – Reflective learning questions

These should be used either at the end or between the questions for discussion and the case studies to reflect on what has been learned. The students should be given sufficient time to discuss their answers.

1. What skills have you used during this lesson?
2. What connections can you make between today’s learning and what we have studied previously?

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