

# **GWLAD GWLAD - OUR MANIFESTO**

## ***Introduction***

**Gwlad Gwlad** is committed to achieving a free and independent Wales in the shortest practical timescale.

- **An independent Wales will not be worthwhile if we continue with the failed policies imposed on us by successive governments in Westminster and Cardiff Bay.**
- **Radical changes are needed to fundamentally change the way Wales is governed, by ensuring the prosperity and wellbeing of our country and its people.**

**Gwlad Gwlad** is willing to combine policies from across the political spectrum – whether perceived as traditionally left wing, centrist or right wing - driven only by the best interests of Wales.

- The current welfare system traps people in welfare dependency. We will develop a Citizen's Income to ensure a fairer system for all.
- A simpler and fairer tax system will encourage investment and shared prosperity for all.
- Many of our public services are outdated and could benefit from a modern approach to the way they are run.
- We **do not** believe in privatisation of our Health Service! We support new models of mutual care and local provision.
- We believe in spreading power and wealth from Cardiff to all parts of Wales in a fair and equitable manner.
- The collective wisdom of the Welsh people is better than the selective opinions of a few politicians and civil servants.
- We are an inclusive party that is open and supportive to all.

**Gwlad Gwlad** is committed to ensuring a strong future for our national language, distinctive heritage, traditions and culture.

**English – Our Common Language. Welsh – Our National Language**

## ***OUR AIMS***

### **INDEPENDENCE:**

To establish a free, sovereign and independent Welsh state.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY:**

Securing a government that is democratically accountable to the people of Wales.

### **PROSPERITY:**

To bring about a flourishing Welsh economy in which all citizens have the opportunity to prosper, with enterprise and hard work being properly rewarded.

### **DISTINCTIVENESS:**

Securing a future for our national language, distinctive heritage, traditions and culture.

### **INTERNATIONALISM:**

Wales should take its proper place among the global community of nations, fostering good relations and mutually beneficial economic links with other states around the world.

## ***OUR PRINCIPLES AND VALUES***

**COMMUNITY:** Civic pride, social inclusion and solidarity between all members of our national community. As citizens of a small country, working together comes easily to us.

**LIBERTY:** Individual liberty and equality before the law, underpinned by an independent Welsh judiciary and system of law courts subject to the general principles of Common Law.

**INCLUSIVITY:** Commitment to the common good of all citizens of Wales whatever their ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, gender.

**RESPECT:** Respect and esteem for our English, Scottish, and Irish neighbours, and a belief that good relations are best fostered and maintained between free and equal nation states.

**RADICALISM:** Radical, pragmatic solutions to the economic and social issues facing contemporary Wales, evaluating ideas according to whether they will benefit Wales and her people - not according to ideology.

## ***POLICIES Outline***

### **1. Welfare and Taxation**

The current welfare benefits system ensnares people in a “welfare trap” – unable to take up employment for fear of losing their benefits. This can be drastically improved by replacing the majority of welfare benefits by a Citizens Income.

All registered citizens would be entitled to a fixed income which would replace unemployment benefit and basic state pension. The unemployed can now choose to supplement their basic income by taking up additional work without losing their Citizens Income payments; people can choose to start up their own businesses in the knowledge they have a guaranteed income while they get up and running. Those receiving disability benefits including Personal Independence Allowance (PIP), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) etc would continue to do so and the systems would be aligned to ensure that no one is disadvantaged.

In the same way, we believe that the tax system, with its extreme complexity and multiple different rates for different types and levels of income, discourages investment and causes too much energy to be channeled towards reducing tax rather than maximising earnings. We therefore advocate a flat tax rate on all income regardless of its source or its level, as practised in several other small nations in Europe

Working taxpayers who are citizens would continue to receive Citizens Income, and we believe that this combination will in practice be broadly cost neutral. The relationship between pre-tax income and take-home pay will be close to what it is under the current system in the great majority of cases. Citizens Income for tax payers could be regarded in practice as a tax refund, or even as a national dividend.

Most importantly, even though the direct impact on people’s net incomes will be insignificant in the short term, we believe that this ‘syncretic’ combination of policies will stimulate enterprise and investment at both ends of the income scale.

- For those on low incomes, it will provide confidence to take on work or to start small businesses while retaining the security of steady and guaranteed income;
- For those on high incomes, we expect the elimination of tax loopholes will lead to an increase in net tax collection, while at the same time incentivising enterprise due to the elimination of marginal rates.

## **2. Education**

Education is critical both to the economic and cultural well-being of any nation. Our economy has been poorly served by a system ill-adapted to the needs of industry, while the nation's culture has been poorly served by the neglect to teach our own heritage, customs and status.

Wales has fallen down the international "PISA" rankings in the last 20 years. We intend to address this as a matter of urgency, by utilising modern best practices from countries such as Finland and the Netherlands where state education is of a particularly high standard.

In supporting bilingualism, we intend to expand Welsh-medium primary and secondary education to the point where, eventually it becomes the norm in every part of Wales. Further details in the culture section of our manifesto.

Our education system is too focussed on academic qualifications, with technical and vocational qualifications being regarded as inferior. We reject this view. It has resulted in a generation of heavily indebted students with qualifications that do not improve their job prospects. It also results in people without academic qualifications being unfairly overlooked for jobs which they are more than capable of doing. We advocate excellence in academic education for students who are suited to it, and excellence in vocational education for students who are suited to that, and we totally reject any distinction in status between the two.

The Humanities content of our National Curriculum should be overhauled to prioritise learning of our history, traditions, culture and values. This will give people confidence in their national identity, and pride in the way Wales has welcomed people from many other cultures throughout its history.

Welsh universities should seek to be world-class in the quality of their teaching and research, and we deplore the current policy of providing Welsh students with funding to study outside of Wales. This amounts to using Welsh taxpayers' money to subsidise other countries' universities. We believe that student funding should generally only be given for students that are studying in Welsh institutions, other than for subjects (such as veterinary science) for which there are no courses currently offered within Wales.

Nevertheless we value the benefits of exposing Welsh students to other countries' education systems as well, broadening their horizons and providing access to

international centres of excellence in particular subjects. We shall therefore strongly encourage exchange schemes, modelled on patterns such as the UK-US Fulbright programme, to enable Welsh students to study elsewhere and other countries' students to study in Wales.

### **3. Health**

Gwlad Gwlad is fully committed to the principle of universal free health care, and is firmly opposed to privatisation of healthcare. We take particular pride in the role of Wales and the Tredegar Medical Aid Society at the initial formation of the NHS. We recognise the efforts and dedication of past and present frontline staff delivering health services under difficult conditions.

However, the current NHS structure has diverged too far from its original vision and has become too centralised and bureaucratic under the control of unelected health boards, and does not always represent good value for money or provide the most effective health care. We believe that other countries have developed more effective systems for the delivery of health services and we need to learn from best practices adopted by others.

We do not train enough of our own doctors and nurses. We intend to expand medical and nursing vocational training. We cannot rely permanently on doctors from beyond our borders, and it is important to employ health staff familiar with our peoples' culture and languages wherever possible.

We believe in providing more local health services - by combining smaller GP clinics into 'Polyclinics' which are able to provide a wider range of services locally, including many outpatient services, similar to former 'cottage hospitals'. These 'Polyclinics' could be run as mutual medical cooperatives - funded by the health service but self-managed.

For specialist acute care and elective surgery, services are best provided by larger institutions, but we recognise that this presents particular challenges in a country with as scattered a population and such poor transport infrastructure as Wales currently has. We therefore regard investment in transport infrastructure as a high priority, not only because of its direct benefit to the economy as a whole but because of the extent to which it would facilitate more efficient healthcare provision across the country.

The current system of health funding through central government from general taxation and National Insurance Contributions is unsustainable. We propose to

develop an alternative system, modelled on best practices from other small European countries such as Luxembourg, combining government funding with mandatory health insurance.

#### **4. Economy**

Both the private sector and the public sector have a role to play in our economy as and where appropriate. We believe that many of our public sector organisations are poorly run and would benefit from some private sector involvement.

We must ensure that all publicly funded contracts include provision for sustainable local content to ensure that money spent by the Welsh Government and local authorities is spent in Wales wherever possible. A good recent example, which we applaud, is the Wales railway franchise that was awarded to a private consortium. This included significant job creation including train manufacturing in Newport, home office and engineering jobs in Pontypridd.

While we are proud to see numerous multinational companies such as Airbus and Ford Motor Co. running successful operations in Wales, we believe that the industrial policies of past governments have led to an over-dependence on firms from outside Wales to provide employment. In many cases, this has resulted in an excessive number of 'branch office' operations offering low-paid jobs which are among the first to be eliminated at times of economic uncertainty or retrenchment.

Our policy is therefore to prioritise the needs of businesses whose head offices are located in Wales, ensuring that they have the appropriate support from councils, infrastructure providers, educational institutions and funding bodies to pursue their trading activities within Wales successfully. However we shall not try to 'pick winners', nor smother small businesses with intrusive help and advice that they have not asked for.

We would like to see Wales develop local enterprises similar to the German 'Mittelstand' - strong family-run businesses which are rooted in and committed to their local communities.

Alongside the private sector we also acknowledge the economic, social and family benefits that the co-operative model can provide. We believe that the essential nature of the Welsh people, our social cohesion and willingness to work together lends itself particularly well to this model. One obvious example that could be emulated is the Mondragon Cooperative in the Basque country that now employs 75,000 workers in 35 countries with a turnover of €12 billion. Their supermarket,

Eroski, sells Basque food and other products in 1000 outlets throughout the Basque country and beyond.

We support the conscious building up of a 'Brand Cymru' to draw attention to agricultural products and manufactured goods of Welsh origin.

The third sector (including housing associations, quangos etc) has become too large, and unaccountable, and this sector needs to be drastically restructured to make it work for Wales.

## **5. Transport**

Our party recognises that the transport connections within Wales, especially between the north and south, are very poor. The consequences of this are severe, both for the economy and also the health service.

While we support the provision of high-quality public transport within and between urban centres, we recognise that over large parts of the country where population is sparse the only viable means of transport is road. This will not change, even with the advent of next-generation technologies such as driverless vehicles. Therefore we are committed to investment in Wales's roads, with a particular emphasis on those running north-to-south within Wales.

More generally, Wales needs a long-term transport policy with consistent funding to improve the road and rail connections between the north and south of Wales. We are currently the only nation in Europe which lacks a comprehensive internal transport infrastructure. Gwlad Gwlad is determined to rectify this situation.

## **6. Environment and Natural Resources**

Gwlad Gwlad supports a diversity of energy sources including renewables, but we are opposed to onshore wind because of its disproportionate disruption to landscapes and communities. Likewise we shall not subsidise the use of agricultural land for solar farms, but will encourage the adoption of solar energy in urban environments. We are very supportive of offshore renewable power generation, whether wind, wave or tidal, seeing Wales as being particularly richly endowed with these resources.

We support investment in modern alternative technologies such as hydrogen technology as a way of storing, transporting and consuming energy generated by renewable methods.

Gwlad Gwlad are not anti-nuclear in principle, but we are opposed to large projects such as Wylfa B would have been, that offer poor value for money and provide insufficient benefit to local people.

Gwlad Gwlad do not subscribe to the 'Nimby' view of objecting to every potential development and recognise that our rural communities are also our workplaces and homes - not just an idyllic landscape to be preserved for tourists. Instead we firmly believe in sustainable rural development providing local jobs and services, but subject to good planning controls to prevent over development and abuse.

Within those constraints we will encourage the extraction and use of coal and gas where this can be accomplished cleanly and safely.

Gwlad Gwlad recognises that our abundant water resources have been heavily exploited over the years for little or no financial gain. We propose to take all water assets within Wales into Welsh public ownership, notably those reservoirs and associated infrastructure operated by Severn Trent, and to place them under the control of existing 'not-for-profit' Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. Exports of water would continue to England without restriction, but will be sold for a fair economic value.

## **7. Policing & Justice**

Control of policing and criminal justice should be immediately transferred from England to Wales, as there is no justification for withholding these powers from Wales when they have already been transferred to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

We are committed to establishing a national police force, 'Heddlu Cymru' to oversee law and order enforcement; protecting members of the public and their property; maintaining law and order in local areas; preventing crime; investigating crime; and reducing the fear of crime by keeping the peace and providing a better quality of life for all citizens.

Heddlu Cymru will provide national support for policing but with the delivery of policing conducted by regional services aligned with local government regions.

Gwlad Gwlad rejects the development of 'Super Prisons' which are mainly used to house prisoners from other areas of the UK. The Welsh prison network should be of a size to serve Welsh needs and not as an overflow for other areas of the UK.

There are currently no women's prison facilities in Wales. We believe Wales should have a women's prison facility but only to accommodate the actual need in Wales.

## 8. Housing

Gwlad Gwlad recognises that there is a shortage of social housing in Wales but that Local Development Plans do not address this need, instead focussing on development of commuter estates. At the same time, there is a glut of empty properties and second homes, particularly in our rural areas, which reduces the supply of homes available for local people.

To address the second home issue we would apply a 500% Council Tax surcharge to all second and subsequent homes.

Gwlad Gwlad recognises that developers purchase land for development but then do nothing with the land, holding it in a 'land bank' which prevents the land from being developed by others. We believe in addressing this issue by applying an 'Undeveloped Land' surcharge on land that has been granted planning permission for development but remains undeveloped for more than two years. The amount of this surcharge shall be equivalent to the value of the Council Tax that would have been collected if the land was developed. Similarly, any property which remains empty for more than one year shall become liable for full council tax.

We would establish a Wales National Housing Agency with responsibilities for:

- Assessing the needs of Wales in regards to housing across all sectors, and provide guidance and instruction to local authorities when preparing Local Development Plans (LDP) - replacing the role of the Planning Inspectorate in this regard.
- Regulating the multiple third sector agencies and housing associations currently operating in Wales.
- Acting as the central funding body for sustainable social housing developments in Wales ensuring that housing needs of locals are prioritised and delivered effectively.

## **9. Government and Democracy**

The establishment of the Welsh Assembly based on the failed Westminster model has not worked well, with government functions now centralised in Cardiff instead of London. We believe in establishing a more decentralised structure with government departments distributed across Wales.

We also need to make our government more participative and inclusive, and we propose to introduce a 'digital democracy' which will allow people to be consulted and vote directly on a wide range of issues.

The current system of 22 local 'unitary' authorities, together with various overlapping regional bodies, is inefficient, ineffective and unaccountable. Similarly there are too many local councillors with little real responsibility.

We believe in establishing 6 regional bodies covering:

- South East
- South Central
- South West
- Central & West
- North East
- North West

These regions take responsibility for all local government services within the region, including education, health, policing etc. Each region shall be controlled by 40-60 elected full-time Commissioners, elected by proportional representation.

Existing regional bodies such as police services and health boards shall be restructured to follow same regional boundaries

We also propose to strengthen our Community Councils - merging them where appropriate to form larger natural communities - and giving them enhanced consultation powers as well as additional powers to deliver a limited range of local services.

## **10. Culture**

Our distinctive language and culture has kept Wales alive and prevented us from being swallowed up into a 'Greater England'. We firmly believe that we must maintain, encourage and widen this cultural distinction as one of our unique selling points.

Welsh medium education will be extended to every primary school in Wales, initially in existing Welsh speaking areas (Y Fro Gymraeg) and ultimately into majority English speaking areas over as short a period as can be achieved.

Similarly all secondary schools shall be Welsh medium to age 14, and then bilingual. This to be implemented progressively following implementation at primary school level, with all secondary schools ultimately becoming Welsh medium. Provision shall be made for supporting English medium education but not including English-only schools.

In order to survive and flourish, the language must be a living thing and not just an academic exercise. We strongly believe in maximising the use of Welsh in daily speech, and in interaction with both public services and private organisations.

## **11. Media**

We believe in the immediate transfer of responsibility for broadcasting and media from England to Wales and the development of a distinctive Welsh news service. We will encourage the establishment of national media outlets in Welsh and English, and increase the amount of Welsh news and current affairs broadcast on television and radio. We will also encourage development of new media channels similar to our own successful News Portal.

## **12. Agriculture**

Gwlad Gwlad holds that the primary purpose of Welsh agriculture is the production of food, to the highest environmental and welfare standards. We reject the view, expressed by some, that sees food production as subservient to management of the rural landscape for the benefit of visitors and incomers. On the contrary we believe in the promotion of a thriving rural economy providing high-value opportunities for those who live and work in it.

We oppose the wholesale planting of vast tracts of trees taking out complete farms and mountains, but we support planting of native trees for environmental benefit, shelter belts, nature corridors, and flooding control.

We shall jealously guard the reputation of Welsh agricultural produce and insist on 'Brand Cymru' being used consistently for Welsh products, giving traceability. We seek to encourage food produced in Wales to also be processed in Wales, adding as much value as possible as close to the source as possible, and to this end we seek to create a single Welsh ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food responsible for the whole process 'from gate to plate'.

The UK government should negotiate tariff free access in both directions with Europe. Gwlad Gwlad notes that the needs of the industry in England are quite different from those of Wales and that needs to be recognised now, with all PGI (Protected Geographic Indicators) and PDO (Products of Designated Origin) being protected. Whatever trade deals are agreed with other countries, food imported into the UK and on to Wales must be of the same standard environmentally and ethically, GM free, hormone free, or of superior quality to home-grown products.

We call for the immediate setting up of a veterinary school in Wales. Additionally, we seek to promote the role of colleges and lifelong learning to support young entrants and older change-of-direction newcomers, teaching both traditional methods and innovative practices including use of IT and advanced environmental sensing technologies.

We shall actively promote the share farming scheme, allowing opportunity for new entrants without the capital to buy and helping to reduce the average age of active farmers.

### **13. Immigration and Residency**

We propose that Wales adopt a policy on Immigration and Residency along the following lines, post-independence and to the greatest extent actionable in the meantime.

- Complete freedom of movement with unrestricted, document-free travel across all land and sea borders. In particular:
  - No restrictions to be placed on English or Irish residents commuting to jobs in Wales or vice versa.
  - No tolls or customs to be placed at land or sea borders.
- Welsh companies to bear responsibility for correct import/export documentation and payment of any tolls or customs applicable on individual transactions, over a threshold to be determined (likely to be similar to the

current UK duty-free threshold of £390). It is anticipated that this will be no more burdensome than current self-assessment requirements for VAT and Corporation Tax.

- The introduction of rules on residency broadly similar to those currently in force in the Channel Islands. In particular:
  - Welsh citizens to have an unrestricted right to lease or buy property anywhere within Wales
  - Non-citizens to have the right to lease or buy property subject to:
    - The property itself having been approved for leasing or purchase by non-citizens
    - The non-citizen having received permission to work in or retire to Wales.
  - Penalties for non-compliance with these residency rules to be applied to property owners who lease or sell property in violation of them.

The philosophy behind this approach is that rules and restrictions are applied not to physical movements of people or goods, but to commercial transactions. This shifts the burden of enforcement onto those who are already responsible for enforcing *other* legal duties such as payment of VAT, corporation tax, council tax or stamp duty. It is not intended or expected that these rules will add appreciably to that burden.

Some of the above assumes a concept of Welsh Citizenship. The full qualifications for Welsh Citizenship will be worked out a later time with reference to best practices from other small, open countries such as Switzerland or Singapore. Even so, they are likely to include:

- Automatic right to citizenship for anyone born in Wales
- Right to apply for citizenship granted to anyone who has had continuous taxable employment in Wales, or been married to another Welsh citizen, for a certain period.
- New citizens to be subject to a test for Welsh language proficiency and knowledge of Welsh history and culture: but this test would be waived for people who qualify by virtue of having been born in Wales or married to a Welsh citizen.

All Welsh residents (including non-citizens living in Wales by permission as described in the previous section) would be obliged to pay the Flat Tax on all income; only citizens would be eligible to receive the Citizens' Income.

## **POLICY RELEVANCE**

Gwlad Gwlad will not pursue policies or express opinions on minority special interests or issues in far away lands, no matter how important they may be seen by some. Our only priority is Wales and it's people.

Our members and representatives may choose to follow their own personal beliefs in such cases. Freedom of speech and the right to express opinions are a core principle of Gwlad Gwlad.

## **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

Gwlad Gwlad believes that Independence can be fully achieved within one Senedd election cycle, ie within 5 years of an Gwlad Gwlad government being elected.

In the meantime we will campaign for a maximum number of powers to be transferred from London to Wales, and for the building blocks of an independent Wales to be established.

Gwlad Gwlad will work with all parties to achieve our goals on a policy-by-policy basis but it is unlikely that we will enter into a coalition with any party, and so will retain our political independence.