

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

CYPE SP 115

Ymateb gan: Jeremy Jones

Response from: Jeremy Jones

Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

Thema 1: Addysg oedran ysgol | Theme 1: School-age education

I would respectfully ask the Committee to look at the increasingly perilous provision for Modern Foreign Languages in secondary schools in Wales, a situation that has worsened significantly since the creation of the new Curriculum for Wales. Languages such as German, that are important for the economy of our country are disappearing from the curriculum in our secondary schools leaving a language diet in schools that is not broad and balanced as promised by the AoLE LLC, but shallow and narrow, and we are losing language language opportunities that will affect Wales for generations. I have attached a letter that I wrote to the Committee in March 2021. It has been endorsed by language professionals and colleagues in both the secondary and Higher Education sector. It has also been endorsed by a Welsh MP knowledgeable about language learning.

Thema 2: Addysg bellach ac addysg uwch | Theme 2: Further and higher education

Thema 3: Iechyd a lles, gan gynnwys gofal cymdeithasol (i'r graddau y maent yn ymwneud â phlant a phobl ifanc) | Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)

Thema 4: Plant a phobl Ifanc | Theme 4: Children and young people



Dear Committee member,

It is with great concern that I feel compelled to write to you and to all members of the Senedd committee scrutinizing the passage of the Education and Assessment (Wales) Bill, regarding the serious situation facing Modern Foreign Languages in our schools in Wales.

I have recently watched the proceedings of the Children, Young People and Education Committee meetings which took place on the 29th January 2021 and the inaugural meeting of the 15th December 2020 and I have been disturbed by the lack of attention afforded to the parlous state of Modern Foreign Languages in our schools. Indeed, the only references to the Area of Learning Experience concerning Language, Literacy and Communication (AoLE LLC) seem exclusively focused on the delivery of the Welsh language, history and culture element. I can only assume that the members of the Committee are unaware of the reality of the situation and the increasingly detrimental effect of the new curriculum on opportunities for real and meaningful language acquisition for our young people.

A reading of the new curriculum would lead many to believe that languages were to be appreciated and valued. Within the new curriculum, the creation of the AoLE LLC (Area of Learning Experience Language, Literacy and Communication) offered hope to language teachers across the country, particularly as the LLC explicitly refers to “multilingualism, plurilingualism and translanguaging within a bilingual Wales in an international context”. Assurances came from the Education Minister Kirsty Williams herself that, “we want all our learners to understand the importance of modern languages and the lifechanging opportunities they can provide.” (1) Other such public communiques led to optimism among language teachers and professionals. The curriculum “should prepare learners to be citizens of Wales and the world”. The government has made it clear that “our National Mission (is) to raise standards for all, tackle the attainment gap, and ensure all children and young people in Wales are supported to meet their full potential, including in the acquisition of languages and a growing awareness and knowledge of the rich and varied cultures that underpin them.” (2) These references to a broad and balanced curriculum and a plurality of language opportunities underpin the LLC and are, one would assume, statutory requirements to meeting the” commitment to languages (which) is front and centre of the Welsh government’s education policies” (3). This is the public message which you have no doubt been given, but this is not the reality in our schools.

The Bill and the AoLE LLC does not have the support of many language teachers. A survey conducted by the British Council of the language teaching profession found that more than fifty percent of respondents felt that the AoLE LLC would have no impact on the uptake of languages, with eleven percent expecting absolutely no improvement to the current situation. There are several reasons why this is the case and I would like to bring them to the attention of the committee members.

The introduction of statutory language provision at primary level is already having a profound effect upon language opportunities in our secondary schools, particularly for any second language. Primaries are now obliged to teach a foreign language, whereas secondary schools, despite the promises of a broad and balanced curriculum and an emphasis on languages have been told that “guidance will be provided for schools, which sets out approaches to school planning and prioritising of languages.” (4) This guidance, this lack of clarity, has led to the firm belief among MFL teachers and possibly SLTs to conclude that Welsh is the language to be prioritised in the AoLE LLC. A further issue of the draft curriculum, which has also adversely impacted upon language opportunities for our young people is the assumption among school leaders that as primaries teach one language and this will invariably be French, schools no longer need to offer a second foreign language opportunity. The consequence of the new Bill is to introduce languages into primary schools, which are already struggling with Welsh, an overcrowded timetable and no language expertise, while successful, well-established and highly effective language departments in secondary schools are being closed and the actual language specialists in our schools are leaving the profession, looking to England for employment or are not entering the profession at all.

This is not simply an issue for schools in rural communities. Some of our largest city schools in Cardiff and Newport have become single language schools, while other schools in our cities must fight annually to retain a second language such as German. While Carmarthenshire has a single school remaining teaching German. Languages are being lost from our curriculum at a faster rate due to the interpretations of this new curriculum. When the loss of these language learning opportunities has been highlighted to government, it was deemed to be merely “regrettable” and a “shame”. By allowing school leaders to create their own curriculum, we are now leaving language learning and multilingual opportunities for our young people to chance. This is at odds with the purported National Mission for languages and leading to a postcode lottery for languages, with for example one Cardiff school offering three languages to its young people, whereas another in Cardiff now intend to offer only one. There is a danger of a lost generation of language learners as children engaged at primary find no provision or further opportunities in secondary. To further undermine languages, there is a growing belief that languages should be taught a carousel of various languages, changing language every term. This demeans the learning of language, allowing no opportunities for real progression or any possibility for the meaningful language acquisition necessary to pass public examinations and progress to higher education.

For language teachers, one of the greatest concerns is the amalgamation of modern languages with Welsh and English in the AoLE LLC. This now places languages with English, a KPI (Key Performance Indicator), used to measure a school’s performance and Welsh, with the incumbent demands of generating a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Language teachers feel that investment and resources will not be used to promote languages. This is a genuine belief that is hard to shake among teachers and the Senedd meetings that I have already witnessed have done little to allay this conviction that languages will receive nothing more than “kind words” from Welsh government.

The Committee may be aware of the great store that has been set by government, in Global Futures and the Consortia as the panacea to our language ills. For language teachers it is good to have an organisation such as Global Futures. Any organisation that has as its remit promoting languages is always welcome, but we need to be mindful of the overarching purpose of the Global Futures programme. The primary aim of Global Futures when it came into being with a five year plan in 2015 was “to increase the number of young people choosing to study modern foreign language subjects at Level 2 (GCSE level or equivalent), at Level 3 (A level or equivalent) and at higher education level”, coupled with ensuring “greater equality of choice and that modern foreign languages are not marginalised” (GF mission statement). In this regard, the project has not met its remit. In the five years from 2015-20, numbers at GCSE and A-level have fallen year on year. Over the past five years, there has been a 28% decline in entries for all languages at GCSE, with French and German seeing falls of 35% and 37% respectively over this period. Looking at this in numerical terms, French GCSE entries have fallen from 4810 in 2015 to 3127 in 2019, with a similar picture for German (2016 – 1196 entries/2019 – 634 entries). With annual drops in GCSE uptake, it is not surprising to see that A-level numbers for all languages are also dire. In 2019, only 314 students studied French for A-level while 77 studied German. Wales has now the worst take up for languages of all four home nations and among the worst records in Europe. This is not a criticism of Global Futures as it is comprised of talented professionals dedicated to languages, there is however a limit to how successful their projects can be when departments, including departments that contribute significant percentages to GCSE and A-level numbers, are closed and/or languages are marginalised in schools.

In short, Modern Foreign Languages in Wales are facing their greatest challenge and this Bill is having a greater impact on loss of opportunities for our young people. A compulsory foreign language to be introduced into primary schools is laudable, acknowledged that there is not the expertise to deliver it. At the same time, secondary schools are now entirely reliant on the good will of school leaders to offer languages to their students which is resulting in a faster marginalisation of languages such as German and a narrowing of learner opportunities not the breadth that the Bill purports and the loss of actual specialists in language teaching. Global Futures initiatives such as the Student Mentoring Scheme and the Languages Ambassador project

can only succeed if there are departments and experts in schools to access them, so too the outstanding work of organisations such as the Goethe Institut. This loss of opportunity continues to occur in spite of the keen learner interest that should be fostered. The government agencies to rectify this such as the Consortia, alongside Global Futures, can do nothing to prevent languages being removed from the curriculum. Indeed, there is even the suggestion that if a language is being offered in one school within a Consortium, then the box for this language is ticked and other schools can therefore close down such departments in their own schools. Applications to teacher training in languages will continue to fall with such narrow employment opportunities, creating a vicious circle of decline and a lack of specialists to reintroduce languages in the future.

For the past three years I have asked questions of the government. I have shared those responses with colleagues through the South Wales Network of German Teachers and others, collated their thoughts and concerns and sought to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the government. I have spoken to colleagues throughout Wales, from major towns to those engaged in rural settings. I have engaged with Higher Education professionals and the young people themselves. It was particularly heartening to read the number of references to modern languages made by contributors to the evidence report for the Children, Young People and Education Committee prior to your discussions. This situation can be reversed, but not through the marginalisation or dissolution of languages, particularly second languages. Once they are gone, they are gone for a generation and with them opportunities for our learners to experience not just the language, but the culture and way of life of our European neighbours that Wales' talented language teachers offer. Indeed, so talented are these individuals that the government has acknowledged that MFL students in Wales achieve extremely well in comparison to other subjects in public examinations.

This Bill can only work for languages if there is a genuine motivation for it to succeed as STEM has succeeded for science and technology, and to which the investment in the Welsh language can attest. School leaders need to be directed and supported to run languages, not simply encouraged. Modern foreign languages, not Welsh alone, need to be given a higher profile by government and to school leaders. A positive affirmation of languages can only be of benefit to the Welsh language itself. As it stands, in terms of modern languages, the AoLE LLC shows a distinct lack of ambition for our young people, which will disadvantage them in the wider world.

I respectfully hope that this information will be of value to the members of the Committee. I have expressed these concerns to government and am prepared to provide all correspondence with the government to the Committee or attend any meeting. After three years of endeavouring to highlight the challenges faced by languages, I am fearful of seeing little change or progress and believe that the shortcomings of the Bill may now need to be available to the public.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Jones

1) Letter from Languages, Literacy and Communication & Cross Curriculum Responsibilities Branch to Jeremy Jones on 28th March 2019

2) Letter from Languages, Literacy and Communication & Cross Curriculum Responsibilities Branch to Jeremy Jones on 18th March 2020

3) BERA report 13th May 2020

4) Letter from Languages, Literacy and Communication & Cross Curriculum Responsibilities Branch to Jeremy Jones on 18th March 2020

Postscript

Since submitting this letter in March, the situation has deteriorated yet further as the largest school in Wales has reduced language provision for German, another school in the capital has become a single language school and a capital city school which provides significant numbers to the national average will become a single language school in under three years.