

WLGA & ADEW response to the Senedd Inquiry into Welsh-medium education (September 2022)

1. Has the current statutory framework for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) improved since the recommendations published in December 2015 in the report of the 'Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans' by the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the Fourth Senedd?

Improvements

- Clearer guidance published to aid development of WESPs.
- More realistic and specific targets.
- Councils welcome the opportunity to plan over a 10-year period as this gives councils an opportunity to identify longer term challenges and provides an extended opportunity to address them. A 10-year plan reduces the planning burden.
- Councils also appreciate the collaboration that has taken place with Welsh Government in the process of developing these new plans. A good working relationship was developed, and thorough and supportive processes were established, which included a series of useful discussion group sessions for officers.

Areas for development

- The funding streams and associated guidance should be aligned with the Welsh Government framework and legislation and its timeline for the WESP. This would assist in long-term planning and would allay any uncertainty.
- More clarity is also needed on the sources of finance and the financial mechanisms available to support the implementation of the WESPs, as there is currently too much ambiguity regarding the various grants and precisely how they may be used in support of Welsh in Education. It is also important to consider how to support and fund WESP ambitions and specific goals e.g., providing specific funding for T2 and T3 schools for a period of time to help implement the changes.
- As the responsibility lies with councils more funding should go directly towards supporting councils' strategies. Due to the different linguistic contexts within each region, working through a regional model does not necessarily meet each council's requirements in terms of their WESP goals in the same way as other education policy areas might. Consideration must therefore be given to how councils can strengthen collaboration with other councils that are linguistically similar and there should be sufficient flexibility to allow collaboration between councils located in different regions if they face similar linguistic challenges. For instance, collaboration between rural counties / counties with similar numbers of Welsh speakers, or collaboration between counties that face similar challenges, such as the challenge of promoting Welsh-language education in areas bordering England.



- The data collection measures should be improved to obtain timely and reliable data to support effective planning. Here are some examples of the challenges involved with the School Workforce Annual Census in particular:
 - i) the data is collected in the Autumn but is not formally released until the end of the academic year.
 - ii) there aren't enough questions on language skills and responses are based on teachers' self-assessment and possible different interpretations of their language abilities.
 - iii) more specific data is needed to plan and apply effective targeted interventions, e.g., if there is one overall question on confidence levels, how should teachers reliably answer if they are very confident in speaking Welsh but less confident with written skills, what weighting should be given?
 - iv) the nursery workforce is not represented in the School Workforce Annual Census.
- In the interest of fairness, it is also important to collect comparative Welsh language data and to understand how councils record and present data; for instance, it isn't fair to compare some percentages when looking at Welsh language data due to the different policies or different approaches to data collection, some local councils will use data from full cohorts whereas others do not. Guidance on this issue would ensure that fair comparisons are drawn nationally.
- Improvements could be measured more easily and reliably if there were a single language continuum for all of Wales.
- Councils have also shared feedback on how engagement with partners can vary. It would be useful to obtain greater clarity from Welsh Government on how partners may support the implementation of the WESPs. In addition to this, it would be beneficial to be able to understand how the range of partners are funded and what requirements have been set for them to support the WESPs as part of their funding conditions. It should be stipulated in grant conditions that partners need to work with councils to support plans to achieve the ambitious targets. This would be very useful in supporting outcome 5 in helping to create more opportunities for learners to use the Welsh language in various contexts within the school (and beyond).
- Welsh should be mainstreamed within the Welsh Government's education department so that each education directorate (e.g. curriculum/ALN/professional learning) supports the implementation of plans and to ensure there is consistency in this important area of work, especially where additional grants are provided from different departments.
- Further guidance will be needed on the next steps and expectations. Ongoing support and guidance from Welsh Government, and additional workshops would be beneficial.

2. To what extent do Welsh in Education Strategic Plans contribute to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – Cymraeg 2050?



- Overall, councils agree that the targets support Cymraeg 2050 and that the expectations are clear for increasing the provision of Welsh-language education through the WESPs.
- One language continuum needs to be established urgently to ensure consistency and set similar national thresholds in evaluating progress in terms of the Welsh language. A single continuum would ensure that resources published in the future and the range of professional learning materials will align with the same framework.

Areas for development

- Local and regional work would be strengthened by having national strategies in place, linked to the consortia working on professional learning and the language charter, e.g., Language Centres should belong to one national network to share best practice and resources. This is very important in terms of ensuring consistency in professional learning.
- More should be done in terms of setting a 'national requirement' for planning for life beyond post-statutory education, including higher education, business and communities, so that learners can continue to use their language skills, which may be in danger of being lost after leaving school. As with the response to question 1, a single language continuum would support this, would promote the concept of lifelong learning and would boost strategies to expand 'Welsh for adults'.
- Nationally, there needs to be more of a focus on the challenges that English-medium schools face in being able to respond to the general aspiration. There should also be a focus on the cultural element so that everyone feels that the language belongs to them and that Welshness is not exclusive to the Welsh-medium sector.
- Developing a national requirement to have a recognised qualification in Welsh to teach in Wales could help support with some of the challenges in recruiting Welsh-speaking staff and would help with continuation planning.

3. How are local authorities responding to changes to guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision, and are they meeting the Welsh Government's ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools?

- Through their WESPs all local authorities have committed to the ambitious 10-year targets for increasing the provision of Welsh-medium education.
- Councils aim to agree on new categories with schools from September 2022 onwards and some councils have already moved all schools along the language continuum over the summer term.
- Councils need further assistance to respond to changes in the guidance in school categorisation, especially in terms of additional costs associated with this transitional work such as tutoring fees, staff time and administrative costs. Welsh Government should analyse where these funding packages should go to help schools to progress through the categories successfully. There needs to be a funding commitment of at least five years to provide assurance to those schools currently embarking on this journey.



- It would also be very useful to set up a toolkit for schools which would support them in moving between language categories, based on the most effective practices where schools have previously transitioned into new categories.

4. What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision, ahead of a proposed Welsh Language Education Bill?

- To ensure appropriate staffing at all levels (local authorities, teachers, ancillary staff, leaders) in Welsh-medium schools.
- It is essential to rapidly increase the number of teachers and support staff who join the profession, who remain in the profession and who can teach through the medium of Welsh.
- Funding will be needed through the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme (*formerly 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme*) to contribute towards achieving the ambitious targets.
- The professional learning programme/offer for staff varies considerably at present. The provision could be strengthened further by making it available nationally. This would ensure greater consistency.
- A national network/forum should be developed to support the work on Welsh immersion for latecomers to gain the best possible impact. Working together nationally under one banner would help language centres to develop consistent methodologies and resources, improve professional learning and strengthen the provision for all.
- For learners with an additional need it is essential that there is parity in the provision that is being offered for pupils with ALN in the English medium sector and the development of staff expertise.
- Opportunities to use the Welsh language after school need enhancing. This is an essential aspect of creating a million Welsh speakers who use the language every day. Work needs to be done with employers and post-16 providers so that their work supports the aims of the WESPs. There is also a need for more marketing and promotional work when it comes to promoting the advantages of the Welsh language nationally to encourage parents and pupils to engage with the language.
- There is room to strengthen the national strategic cohesion when it comes to working as a nation to reach our Welsh language targets, to ensure that there is a clear and transparent national programme of action, with councils contributing to this important work through their WESPs.