

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Welsh Language and Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

WLE 11

Ymateb gan: Estyn

Response from: Estyn

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## **Estyn evidence on the general principles of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill**

Thank you for the opportunity to present this evidence. We very much welcome the Bill and think it is important in supporting the objectives, vision and strategy for the Welsh language 'Cymraeg 2050 : A million Welsh speakers'. We support the overall principles of the Bill and support the fact that the Bill reflects how ambitious the Government's target is of reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Essentially, this depends on increasing the numbers leaving the education system as confident Welsh speakers. We believe that the education system plays an important role in considering these challenges, along with the ambition for all learners to become confident Welsh speakers through the statutory education system. The introduction of the Welsh and Education Bill is a positive step towards making this a reality and giving the Welsh language status.

We want to provide the comments below on specific aspects of the Bill and hope that these will be useful for the development of the Bill.

### **1. Role of local authorities**

In our view, the Bill will inform the decisions that the local authorities make in planning the authority's education provision. We as an organisation will be able to contribute by monitoring this provision and scrutinising Welsh in Education Strategic Plans within local authorities (WESP) as part of our work with local authorities. However, there are a few points that could be considered further:

- The definitions of the linguistic categories are not specific enough. We believe this could cause confusion for the authorities and parents alike.
- The desire to raise standards within 'Primarily English Language, partly Welsh' schools is an integral step and one we support, but what we find troubling is the possibility that meeting the two language categories 'Primarily English Language, partly Welsh' and 'Dual Language' would impede the move towards establishing new Welsh-medium schools ('Primarily Welsh Language') in a few authorities.
- The education system is currently not producing enough Welsh speakers to meet the number of teachers needed and that the lack of recruitment is proving to be even more difficult in some authorities. It could also affect the appointment of certain officers within a few authorities responsible for promoting the Welsh language. This is the main challenge that exists – the challenge of equipping the education workforce with the necessary language skills. We appreciate the work that has been undertaken as part of the Welsh Workforce Plan but we believe that this plan will need to be built on with the introduction of the Bill. For example, it will be necessary to ensure a clear strategy for developing a professional workforce with the necessary language skills.
- Significant funding will be required if language training is to be offered to teachers within schools – see ((p.15 23 3 (d) *Making training, professional development and support available for education practitioners in Wales for the purpose of improving capacity in Welsh*).
- We believe that youth work conducted by local authorities either themselves or through agreements with other bodies should be ensured to be part of any Welsh in Education Action Plan. The youth work sector performs an important role educationally and socially. The sector's ability to extend use of Welsh within and

outside education settings and in diverse contexts should be central to any strategy to create more active speakers and raise meaningful use of Welsh in different domains.

- We believe that it should be local authorities' duties to promote late immersion provision for parents, carers and learners. We suggest strengthening the wording from 'provide information' to 'promote and encourage' in the following ; *'Each local authority must make arrangements to provide information and advice to...children of compulsory school age in its area and parents of children in its area'* 22 (2)(b)(i) (ii). If we are to increase the use of Welsh within families, promoting and emphasising the importance of immersion for parents is essential. See the following case studies: [Effective immersion: supporting learners to make swift progress when supporting them to learn about and appreciate Welsh history and culture. - Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#) [Using the Welsh language: well-intentioned and unique extra-curricular activities that support learners to speak Welsh increasingly spontaneously on the Nant site and in the local community – Estyn\(gov.Cymru\)](#)
- We believe that authorities should work with post-16 providers to make sure that opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh and develop Welsh language skills continue after young people leave statutory education.

## 2. Welsh Ministers

- The Government's language strategy is being set out in legislation for the first time. We support the idea that the continuum emulates the concept of the international standards provided by the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR) in terms of language levels. We also welcome that the continuum has a sound legal basis to enable the development of policies and future action plans. We believe that as Welsh Ministers will actually prepare the framework (National Framework for Welsh Language Education and Learning Welsh), it will be clear how they will implement the Welsh language strategy proposals in relation to Welsh language education, (lifelong) Welsh language learning and acquiring the Welsh language.
- We believe that the Bill (through the work of Welsh Ministers) will create a chain of accountability between language planning undertaken at school, local authority and national level.
- However, we believe that the Welsh Ministers need to ensure that there is purposeful and swift action to address the shortfalls in the workforce that do not currently speak Welsh within education.
- We believe it is possible to strengthen the summary or descriptions for language categories. As they stand, they could be complicated or misleading (mainly for parents when choosing schools). The danger is that some parents would feel that the provision within a 'Dual Language' and 'Primarily English Language, partly Welsh' category school would be sufficient to meet the needs of their children in terms of Welsh language provision, as opposed to those pupils benefitting from a 'Primarily Welsh language' category.
- In reference to the amount of provision, we will ensure that during inspections we have due regard to the time assigned to Welsh-medium provision hours

ensuring that schools do not go below the minimum. 10(3) states '*In determining the range for the 'Main Language – English, partly Welsh' language category, Welsh Ministers may not set a minimum for the range less than 10%. But we need to emphasise how vital and important it is to look at the quality of provision offered within that time.*

- Apart from the duty to engage with Medr on the framework, there is insufficient clarity of how the framework and other duties in the Bill fit into Medr's duties to
  - *'encourage the demand for provision through the medium of Welsh in Welsh tertiary education;*
  - *take all reasonable steps to ensure that there is sufficient Welsh tertiary education provided through the medium of Welsh to meet the demand;*
  - *encourage the provision of tertiary education through the medium of Welsh—*
  - *from registered providers in Wales, and*
  - *by other persons providing tertiary education funded by or otherwise secured by the Commission'.*

### **3. National Institute for Learning Welsh**

- We strongly agree with the principle that specialist support for lifelong Welsh language learning, including school education, should be within one single institution such as the 'National Institute for Learning Welsh'. This objective '*is to support people to learn Welsh, and facilitate their progress, so that more people (of all ages) learn the language'* 37 (1). An institute like this will enable experts from all sectors to come together to plan linguistically across all sectors providing consistency to the journey of learners of all ages along the language continuum.
- The expertise and work of the 'The National Centre for Learning Welsh' needs to be extended in establishing this body which will be a powerhouse to share good practice, raise expectations for all sectors and align what is happening across statutory and in fact non-statutory education sectors, for example adult education. We believe that the role of the revamped National Centre for Learning Welsh is key not only in training the education workforce but also in improving the pedagogy of that workforce and successfully acquiring a second language as a form of communication. The emphasis on verbal communication and the spoken language as opposed to teaching as a subject with exams is a main aim and a crucial one. Here are examples below of what is currently available through the Centre.  
[Learn Welsh Inspection report Learn Welsh Nant Gwrtheyrn 2023 \(gov.wales\)](#)  
[Effective immersion: supporting learners to make rapid progress while supporting them to learn and appreciate Welsh history and culture. - Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#)  
[Using the Welsh language: well-intentioned and unique extra-curricular activities that support learners to speak Welsh increasingly spontaneously on the Nant site and in the local community - Estyn \(gov.cymru\)](#)
- The National Centre for Learning Welsh has expertise in language learning and acquisition, and, during our inspections we have indicated that such expertise should be shared with other sectors. In addition, we have published

case studies on how the adult Welsh sector produces active speakers, for example

[Effective support helps learners speak Welsh fluently - Estyn \(gov.cymru\)](#)

[Formal and informal learning methods that enable learners to assimilate into the Welsh community - Estyn \(gov.cymru\)](#)

[Turning learners into Welsh language users - Estyn \(llyw.cymru\)](#)

as well as offering valuable training to the education workforce:

[Increasing the number of Welsh speakers in the education workforce - Estyn \(gov.cymru\)](#)

- The Centre, and the Welsh for adults sector, are very familiar with the expectations and levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As a result, it would be possible to consider and adapt the national curriculum of the sector, which is based on the CEFR, as the basis for the language continuum in each sector. The National Centre for Learning Welsh is already responsible for Welsh language training for workforces through the 'Work Welsh' scheme. We believe, therefore, that it would be logical to extend the function of the National Centre for Learning Welsh, drawing on its experience and expertise, to create a body that would offer strategic and practical leadership across the education sectors. See the latest inspection report (April/May 24) which outlines how the role of the National Centre for Learning Welsh has evolved very quickly and is an effective body. In establishing the Institute, it will be necessary to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly identified showing how the Institute is intertwined with any other relevant bodies.
- As already stated, we support the idea that the continuum emulates the concept of the international standards provided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). We also welcome that the continuum has a sound legal basis to enable the development of policies and future action plans. It is also important that it is regularly reviewed and evaluated. As a result, the document could confidently be used as the basis for planning the provision for the teaching of Welsh. However, it is key that the introduction of the continuum is supported by a comprehensive programme of professional development for teachers and classroom assistants. Identifying the stages of linguistic development with guidance that tracks progress from one period to the next would be a vital resource and tool to equip teachers and classroom assistants.
- We believe it is vital for learners of all ages to have opportunities to start or continue on their journey towards becoming active speakers. Creating a single language continuum, as well as specific schemes, such as the new scheme to offer free courses to 16-25 year olds, would provide truly equal opportunities for learners of all ages to do so. We also believe that lifelong education, including adult learning partnerships in the community, needs to do much more than they currently do to provide equal opportunities for Welsh speakers, whether proficient learners or fluent speakers, to learn through the medium of Welsh and consequently improve and use their language skills. We feel the need to understand effective pedagogy in teaching and acquiring Welsh as a second language, for example as seen in the Welsh for adults sector. The case study [Increasing the number of Welsh speakers in the education workforce - Estyn \(llyw.cymru\)](#) demonstrates the type of work that has taken place and has now grown to become an increasingly broad offering to the education workforce through the Centre for Learning Welsh for Adults.

Another case study from the Centre which is yet to be published is: 'How the Welsh Language Learning sector influences pedagogy and language acquisition in other sectors in Wales and beyond.'

- We appreciate seeing that '*The Learning Welsh Institute may also ... give financial assistance to any Welsh language learning provider in relation to teaching or learning Welsh*' 37 (3) (c). We firmly believe that money should not be a barrier to the people of Wales to learn Welsh.