
Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

Evidence by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

This document provides the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee with an overview of the state of Welsh-medium provision in the higher education (HE) sector in light of current issues facing the sector.

Summary

- Almost all Welsh universities are making cuts to staff, provision and professional services. Although universities do give consideration to the Welsh language in their plans, cuts have already had negative effects on Welsh language provision and services.
- Further cuts are likely to have further negative effects on the Welsh language.
- Less Welsh-medium provision in universities will be detrimental to Cymraeg 2050 goals because of:
 - Fewer opportunities for HE students to use, maintain and develop their Welsh. This could lead to loss of skills and confidence, and fewer young people willing to use their Welsh.
 - Fewer graduates entering the workforce able to work through the medium of Welsh, including in key areas such as education, health and care.
- Reduced Welsh-medium provision in universities also runs counter to the objectives of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill, which puts the target of one million speakers on a statutory basis. Achieving the Bill's objectives requires training an education workforce with advanced skills in Welsh. There must be enough graduates who have those skills.
- After the Bill is implemented, in time all learners should leave statutory education as independent Welsh speakers. Welsh language provision in HE

will need to be expanded, not reduced, to allow those learners to continue to maintain and develop their Welsh.

- Broader trends and policy decisions impact the potential pool of students and the sustainability of Welsh and bilingual provision. For example, 47% of Welsh HE students attend universities outside Wales, and this increases to 65% of students who have been part of the Seren Academy.

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Evidence base

The evidence in this document is based on:

- Universities' responses to formal requests for information. In March 2025, the Coleg wrote to all Welsh universities requesting information about their plans to safeguard Welsh-medium provision in the face of the current uncertainty. To date, seven have provided a written response.
- Meetings the Coleg has held with staff (at all levels) and students.

Commitment to the Welsh language

All universities that have responded to the Coleg's request for information emphasise that they remain committed to their strategic plans for the Welsh language.

Redundancy schemes

Almost all universities that have responded to the Coleg's request for information have or are in the process of running voluntary redundancy schemes. They note that they are giving consideration to the Welsh language and seek to avoid adverse impacts on Welsh-medium academic provision and professional services.

However, the Coleg has seen that redundancy schemes can unintentionally lead to a reduction in Welsh-medium learning opportunities and in the quality the student

experience. There is a risk of losing individuals who make an important contribution to Welsh-medium provision and Welsh-medium professional services.

Examples of voluntary redundancies putting pressure on Welsh-medium provision at four different universities

- Paramedic Science – 36 students are studying 40cr+ through the medium of Welsh in 2024/25 but the main Welsh-medium lecturer is leaving under a voluntary redundancy scheme.
- Music – three members of staff who between them provided 80cr through the medium of Welsh have left under a voluntary redundancy scheme.
- Quantity Surveying – the Welsh-medium provision has ceased following the departure of a member of staff under a voluntary redundancy scheme.
- Business – 1.5 members of staff have left one university since summer 2024, putting pressure on Welsh-medium provision.

Examples of pressure on Welsh-medium support services

- The Welsh Development Manager (Health) of one university has taken voluntary redundancy. This affects the way Welsh-medium provision is designed and developed across several courses in a priority area.
- In another university, certain responsibilities for central services have been placed on the Welsh-language team, e.g. answering switchboard calls for the whole university.
- Student representatives report that complaints from students about the provision and services in Welsh have increased. In one case, for example, there was no funding to translate an English multiple-choice exam paper so students taking the assessment in Welsh had to write an extended essay in the exam rather than sit the multiple-choice paper.

Provision

Several universities are currently considering and consulting on proposals to reorganise provision, but only Cardiff University has published a list of departments and courses being considered for winding down as part of their formal proposals. Cardiff University's original proposals included Nursing, where there is Welsh-medium provision and where the Coleg has been investing for several years. The announcement that Nursing will not be closing is therefore welcome, although it will be necessary to ensure that students are still able to study through the medium of Welsh and are supported and encouraged to do so.

As a result of Cardiff University's announcement, there are no known proposals to close departments or eliminate courses that would directly lead to a reduction in Welsh-medium provision. Nevertheless, several consultations and schemes are underway across the sector and the Coleg keeps in close contact with universities about them. Universities in general report that they consider alternative ways of delivering Welsh-medium provision rather than abolishing it.

It is extremely important that universities reviewing their provision in the face of the current crisis do not make decisions that have national implications for Welsh-medium provision. Only one or two universities offer certain subjects through the medium of Welsh. If they were to end that provision without consultation, based solely on their own interests, it could have a far-reaching impact on the availability of the subject throughout Wales. The Coleg will be working closely with Medr on an exercise to map 'fragile' provision, but universities should be encouraged not to make any decisions to end provision until the mapping work has been completed and an element of national planning can be introduced.

Pressure on subjects with smaller numbers

- Several subjects such as Music and MFL are available through the medium of Welsh in one university only. Should the university abolish the provision, it would not be possible to study them at all through the medium of Welsh.

- Religious Studies is another example of a subject under pressure. This has been raised by [Cytûn](#).

Opportunities to develop provision

- Some universities are developing centres of excellence and Welsh language hubs to support students and to provide key services. This includes the development of Welsh-medium academic provision in cross-disciplinary areas.
- Some universities are identifying opportunities to increase and develop Welsh-medium provision, including the development of Welsh-medium pathways for all students.
- Several universities have referred to plans to develop the Welsh language skills of their current staff with the aim of increasing the workforce capable of providing education and services through the medium of Welsh.

Curriculum review

Some universities are also undertaking curriculum reviews and are considering plans to 'streamline' modules and possibly remove modules with small numbers of students or introduce a minimum numbers threshold.

Although universities must implement a sustainable business plan and to some extent respond to market demand, they should not treat Welsh-medium provision in the same way as English-medium provision, as the number of students on individual Welsh-medium modules will inevitably be smaller. This is particularly true in some specialist subjects where the numbers of students studying the subject to A Level through the medium of Welsh are also small.

Examples of concerns arising due to curriculum review

- Several lecturers and universities have noted that a reduction in overall teaching capacity is putting pressure on Welsh-medium lecturers to spend less time teaching through the medium of Welsh.
- A move away from 10cr modules and towards larger modules creates challenges in terms of capacity to deliver 100% Welsh modules.
- A move away from joint honours provision is causing challenges in some universities. This affects subjects such as Welsh, which has traditionally been combined with other subjects.

Examples of opportunities that may arise from curriculum review

- One university is consulting on a 'Block and Flexible' delivery model, which could facilitate the introduction of Welsh-medium provision to more subjects.
- Another university has developed a model of identifying 40 credits of generic provision at levels 4, 5 and 6.

Wider policy influences

Wider policies also affect the ability of universities to offer Welsh-medium provision.

Many students choose to attend universities outside Wales, reducing the potential pool of students who could study part of their HE course through the medium of Welsh. More graduates with Welsh language skills are needed to achieve Cymraeg 2050 goals, but over half of those who leave Wales to study at university do not return during their most economically productive years.

In 2023/24, around 23,000 learners were involved in the Seren Academy programme, with 24% coming from Welsh and bilingual schools. Seren encourages learners to apply to universities primarily outside of Wales, with 65% of Seren learners going on to study outside Wales in 2023, compared to 47% for Wales as a whole.

The Coleg is of the view that the Seren Academy should ensure that all centres provide specific information and support about opportunities to study in Welsh or bilingually, emphasising the importance of the language in the workplace. There is also a need to ensure that young people do not get the indirect message that HE in Wales – and therefore Welsh-medium HE – is of a lower standard.

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