

CFA09 Monmouthshire County Council

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol |
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Cymraeg i bawb? | Cymraeg for all?

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Sir Fynwy | Evidence from: Monmouthshire County Council

1. What are the main barriers that prevent wider use of the Welsh language in areas with fewer Welsh speakers, and what might help to change this?

In areas with fewer Welsh speakers, it is challenging for people to gain exposure and immersion in the language, which contributes to its limited use. Those who wish to use Welsh in their daily lives might only have the opportunity when interacting with public services. Although public services, such as local authorities, make significant efforts to employ Welsh speakers, this can be incredibly difficult due to the shortage of Welsh speakers. Vacant positions often need to be advertised multiple times to find a Welsh speaker, as there are few applicants for these roles. Consequently, even when engaging with public services, people are not always guaranteed to be able to do so in Welsh.

The lack of easy access to Welsh-medium education is another contributing factor. In some areas, options for Welsh-medium education are very limited, and pupils face lengthy travel times to their nearest Welsh-medium school. This is particularly problematic for pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school, where parents may choose to send their child to a nearby English-medium school rather than have them travel lengthy distances each day to a Welsh-medium school. This situation negatively impacts the number of children who leave school with Welsh language skills and enter the workforce, perpetuating the cycle.

2. What sort of spaces and opportunities might encourage greater use of, and increase confidence in, the use of the language in areas where day-to-day use of the language is limited?

Welsh-speaking community groups and conversation clubs are highly beneficial in encouraging greater use of the language, as they provide Welsh speakers and learners with more exposure and an opportunity to use the language. The Mentrau Iaith also play an integral role in promoting and enabling the language, particularly in areas with fewer Welsh speakers. Their work, which includes engaging with schools and organising community events, is invaluable and offers significant support to local authorities.

Additionally, cultural events such as the Eisteddfod are instrumental in normalising the language and showcasing it as a living, vibrant part of Welsh culture. The Eisteddfod has significantly enhanced the provision of events for learners and newcomers to the language through activities at the Maes D stage and the availability of simultaneous translations for events. This inclusivity fosters curiosity about the Welsh language and culture.

Such initiatives help people realise that the language belongs to everyone, even those who may not have previously felt a connection to it. This contributes to a positive shift in attitudes towards the Welsh language, encouraging its use and appreciation.

3. Can you share examples of successful initiatives or activities that have encouraged Welsh language use in areas where use of the language is limited?

The Cymraeg i Bawb partnership has had a significant positive impact on promoting Welsh-medium education in South-East Wales. This partnership has facilitated strong collaborative efforts between all stakeholders, with fantastic support from champion **Llio Elgar**, ensuring a unified approach and consistent positive messaging surrounding Welsh-medium education. As previously mentioned, Welsh-medium education is crucial for ensuring the wider use of the language and securing Welsh language services in the future.

The Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 Strategy is a clear and ambitious plan for the language's trajectory, the strategy fosters motivational efforts among public bodies and other organisations to help achieve this goal. This is particularly beneficial in areas with fewer Welsh speakers, as it encourages leaders to understand the national importance of promoting and preserving the language.

Local Authorities' Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) are vital for promoting Welsh-medium education throughout the county, and they are especially important in areas with fewer Welsh speakers. These strategies provide councils with clear targets and aspirations for the provision of Welsh-medium education within their counties and outline how these goals will be achieved.

Internal local authority initiatives for promoting the Welsh language within the workforce are also integral to increasing opportunities for Welsh to be used in these areas. In communities with fewer Welsh speakers, recruiting Welsh speakers for roles can be challenging. To address this, councils are putting greater efforts into increasing the skill levels within their current workforce by providing opportunities to learn the language during work hours. Additionally, offering staff support and regular updates on how they can integrate the Welsh language into their work, even if they do not speak it fluently, fosters a positive atmosphere towards the language within the workforce. This approach enables councils to improve the Welsh language services they provide and therefore provide greater opportunities for the language to be used within our community.

4. What How could technological technology and digital offers help to increase the use of the Welsh language, for those who use the language infrequently or who lack confidence?

The Arfor project, which has been implemented in the heartlands of the Welsh language, has focused on strengthening the identity of communities with a high density of Welsh speakers by supporting the use and visibility of the language. It would be highly advantageous to learn from the lessons of this project to establish a similar initiative in areas with fewer Welsh speakers. For example, collaborating with businesses to help them realise the potential of integrating the Welsh language into their operations could be beneficial. Increasing the visibility of the language in areas with fewer speakers will help to boost its use and encourage more people to learn Welsh.

One of the barriers facing local authorities in promoting the language is the lack of available funding. Establishing a specific fund or grant by the Welsh Government to promote the Welsh language in areas with fewer speakers would be very beneficial. This targeted financial support would enable local authorities to implement effective strategies and initiatives to increase the use and visibility of Welsh, fostering a more inclusive and bilingual community.

Hosting the National Eisteddfod in Monmouthshire in 2016 provided a fantastic opportunity to promote the Welsh language and introduce it to those who had never previously engaged with it. Residents were able to see the language being used as a living, vibrant part of everyday life, fostering a sense of ownership and cultural identity where it might not have existed before. Additionally, learners and speakers within the community were given the chance to be completely immersed in the language, hearing and using Welsh throughout the Maes. This unique opportunity allowed them to experience immersion in Welsh while staying within their own community, without the need to travel to areas where the language is more widely spoken.

5. What impact, in your view, do cultural events such as national Eisteddfodau or Welsh language festivals have on Welsh language use, particularly in areas with fewer Welsh speakers?

Cultural events such as the Eisteddfod have a significant impact on Welsh language use in areas with fewer Welsh speakers. These events provide an opportunity to showcase the language and cultural heritage to those who may not have previously considered its importance. They demonstrate that Welsh is a living language, extending beyond its administrative use.

The Eisteddfod helps foster a sense of cultural identity for everyone, regardless of whether they are Welsh speakers or not, and contributes to the belief that the language belongs to all. Hosting the Eisteddfod locally encourages schools in the area to participate and get involved, which they might not do if they had to travel further afield.

For Welsh speakers and learners, the Eisteddfod offers a unique opportunity to be completely immersed in the language, using it throughout the Maes. This is particularly important as it allows them to experience immersion within their own community, reinforcing their sense of belonging.

Additionally, the Eisteddfod showcases the area to Welsh speakers who might not have visited before, encouraging them to return even after the event has concluded. This continued visitation means that Welsh speakers are coming into the area, using the language, and making it heard more frequently within the community.

Festivals and Eisteddfodau also provide opportunities for community engagement and participation. They create a sense of belonging and pride among attendees, encouraging them to use and appreciate the language in a social and celebratory context.

6. How might these events (whether large or small in size) be adapted or improved to better serve communities with fewer Welsh speakers?

Ensuring inclusive programming at events is crucial for engaging Welsh learners and non-speakers. This can be achieved by offering activities and sessions specifically designed for them, such as beginner language workshops, bilingual performances, and interactive sessions that encourage participation regardless of language proficiency.

Involving local schools, businesses, and community groups in the planning process can also foster a sense of ownership over the event and engagement within the community. This collaborative approach increases the likelihood that more people will participate in and engage with these events regardless of language level.

It is vital that events are designed to be welcoming and accessible to all. This includes providing clear bilingual communication, ensuring physical accessibility, and creating an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable and valued.

7. Are there any other matters you would like to draw to the Committees attention about the Welsh Government's approach to supporting the Welsh language in areas with fewer Welsh speakers?