

CFA11 Mudiad Meithrin

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: Mudiad Meithrin | Evidence from: Mudiad Meithrin

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?

Mudiad Meithrin believes that every child in Wales has the right to be a Welsh speaker, by accessing Welsh education. In areas where Welsh is not heard on the street, the language is perceived as a language of education only - or a language that is the preserve of specific individuals within the community. As a result, some individuals believe that the Welsh language is not relevant to them.

Analysis conducted by the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities on the 2021 Census raises concerns that unconscious behaviour in terms of intergenerational language transmission is no longer always present, even in areas with the highest density of Welsh speakers.

The language transmission rate among couple households in which one adult could speak Welsh fell from 45.4% in 2011 to 40.4% in 2021. Welsh language transmission rates in couple households where only one partner could speak Welsh were higher when it was the woman who was the Welsh speaker. Nevertheless, the percentage of families in this category who were transmitting the Welsh language within the household was less than 50%. The transmission rates for single-parent households (male or female) are the same (53%).

A lack of awareness regarding where the Welsh language is used is a barrier for Welsh speakers and learners. It is suggested that promoting the ability to communicate in Welsh, as well as the fact

that people are welcome to use the language, is a means of overcoming this barrier.

A lack of time is a major barrier for individuals who are interested in learning Welsh. Introducing Welsh classes in the workplace as part of a professional learning scheme would therefore be very beneficial in terms of enhancing the use of Welsh within communities.

We note the need to increase the number of people who can work through the medium of Welsh in a number of specialist areas and services that are a part of young families' lives. These include midwives, health visitors and various other professionals. We must also ensure that language awareness training is a core element of the professional development of workers across sectors that are a part of young families' lives, in order to ensure that the messages conveyed regarding the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism are accurate and consistent.

We note the need to conduct long-term longitudinal research as one way of meeting these goals.

There is a need to keep working with experts in the area of nudge theory and behavioural change, learning from the work that has already been carried out in the area of health, as a means of increasing goodwill towards the Welsh language and further normalising its use. There is a need to develop a better understanding of the things that influence the attitudes and linguistic choices of individuals.

Professor Bernadette O'Rourke's recent work in mapping language use within multilingual cities provides an objective way of mapping the language use of multilingual citizens in their daily lives.

Additionally, we propose that research based on the autobiographical narratives of individuals would be a way of developing an understanding of the influences on the current population.

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?

Mudiad Meithrin's aim is to give every young child in Wales the opportunity to access early years services and experiences through the medium of Welsh, as we know that accessing care and education through the medium of Welsh in the early years makes it easier for people to become confident Welsh speakers.

A recent report by the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities (July 2024) notes that, without the support of the education system, only in a few communities could children from households where Welsh is not spoken acquire the language. The family provides the foundation for children's development. Supporting parents and the wider community in terms of introducing and using Welsh as a natural part of our children's everyday lives is vital for the future of the Welsh language.

We must emphasise the benefits of household language transmission, but we must also recognise the fact that language is a wider social phenomenon. Decisions by parents to introduce the Welsh language to their children early in their lives can bear fruit within a relatively short time. Therefore, we should consider the role of the community, the extended family and others in respect of language transmission to children.

These activities support the Welsh Government's national policy on Welsh language transmission and use within families, and they support the use of the Welsh language by children and their families, with a focus on bridging between education and care, as well as the community and the family itself.

The activities of Cymraeg for Kids (*Cymraeg i Blant*) and Clwb Cwtsh specifically seek to raise parents' confidence in using Welsh with their children. Meanwhile, Cylchoedd Ti a Fi provide Welsh-medium meeting places for parents and their children. In order to ensure success, we must take care and acknowledge the fact that families need time to become accustomed to using the Welsh language. These initiatives therefore provide opportunities to introduce the language and practise its use in a supportive and fun environment.

We need action to refresh the Welsh language skills of people who may not have used the language since leaving school, or those who have lost confidence in their language skills, so that they can speak Welsh to their own children. One key factor to consider is the effect of language use between adults on a child's perception

of the usefulness of the Welsh language. Recent and current schemes have focused on encouraging parents to use Welsh with their children, in order to normalise the use of the language and increase the number of native speakers. Nevertheless, research shows that the language of parents' interactions is the thing most likely to affect children's language use patterns over time, thereby laying solid foundations for Welsh-language transmission to the next generation.

We could build on what is already being offered by:

- providing Saturday/Sunday sessions for parents and carers who work throughout the week in order to extend contact opportunities beyond periods of maternity/paternity leave.
- investing in the development of adult-child sessions that include representation from diverse groups, targeting activities that attract fathers/men and children, and diverse community groups to participate.
- encouraging collaboration across providers to offer a variety of activities for young families. Dancing sessions (e.g. Diddy Dance sessions are available in English) or sporting groups would provide opportunities to introduce Welsh as the natural language of use in social settings.
- resuming specific local campaigns that encourage all Welsh speakers to start every conversation in Welsh, in order to increase awareness that the Welsh language is a part of every community in Wales.
- investing in a marketing plan to promote the use of Working Welsh (*Iaith Gwaith*) badges, so that individuals who speak Welsh are more aware of the range of settings in which they can use the Welsh language.
- investing in the provision of Clwb Cwtsh sessions and Clwb Cwtsh practice sessions in the community.

Over the next Senedd term, there will be a need to reopen or expand 70 of the Cylchoedd Meithrin (as well as Cylchoedd Ti a Fi, in areas where they do not already exist), and a need to support all of the Cylchoedd Meithrin to remain open as important community resources. We also note the need for significant capital funds to pay for extensions and modifications, as finding suitable locations will be challenging.

We must also encourage and support a culture of exploring the reasons why some families choose to pursue Welsh education and why some families do not.

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?

Across Wales, Cymraeg for Kids groups encourage and support parents and families to transmit the Welsh language to their children, through baby massage and yoga sessions, as well as story and song sessions.

The provision of a national network of Cylchoedd Ti a Fi sessions, in which people either meet in traditional settings (e.g. in village halls) or meet outside to go for a walk led by a professional Ti a Fi officer, ensures that clear, consistent and timely messages are shared with families.

There are a number of historically successful schemes that could be reintroduced, subject to some minor updates. We refer specifically here to schemes such as 'Kids Soak it Up', *Mae dy Gymraeg di'n Grêt* ('Your Welsh is Great') and *Cymraeg o'r Crud* ('Welsh from the Cradle'). The provision and implementation of these schemes (along with the necessary financial investment) would once again support and increase Welsh language transmission and the use of the language within families and the wider community. These schemes also offer a means of discussing the benefits of the Welsh language, bilingualism and multilingualism in a general context and in the context of Welsh education, in particular, with the families who attend the sessions.

Clwb Cwtsh courses encourage families to re-engage with the language or to develop Welsh skills that are appropriate and relevant for use at home with the youngest children.

Specific days and events that are held with various partners provide opportunities to raise awareness of the language and increase Welsh-language activities in specific areas. In order to ensure their success, they must be held regularly, thereby providing safe spaces for individuals to start conversations and encouraging them to use their Welsh within their communities.

The Dewin and Doti Festival, held annually in June by Mudiad Meithrin across Wales, provides opportunities for families and young children to come together in a social space. As well as providing opportunities to experience live Welsh language entertainment, it also highlights the breadth of Welsh-speaking communities within different localities.

To this end, Mudiad Meithrin is calling on the Welsh Government to expand its activity in the area of language transmission by supporting parents and extended family members through various programmes and groups, such as Cylchoedd Ti a Fi, Cymraeg for Kids, Clwb Cwtsh and *Cymraeg yn y Cartref* ('Welsh at Home').

4. How could technology and digital tools help to increase the use of the Welsh language, especially among those who use the language infrequently or who lack confidence?

Apps that read stories and present Welsh songs are useful for speakers who lack confidence in their Welsh language skills, because they can learn the pronunciation of words and can therefore be sure that this is accurate when reading with their children. One example of this is the Ogi Ogi app.

Also, YouTube channels - such as Dewin and Doti's channel - help families use more Welsh at home and normalise the use of the language by ensuring that there are safe digital spaces for content that is relevant to our youngest children, and do so in a way that is obvious to non-Welsh-speaking families.

There is a need to invest in developing contemporary music playlists on common platforms such as Spotify in order to facilitate the informal use of Welsh in our communities.

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?

There is a need to ensure that Welsh is seen as an inclusive language when communicating about events, and a need to ensure that local people are included in meaningful ways, and to consider the representation of race and culture in decisions.

Cultural events such as the National Eisteddfod have the ability to have a positive impact, provided they bring people with them along the journey. We must ensure that non-Welsh speakers in the audience understand what is going on. Institutions like the Eisteddfod must engage with local residents who are not Welsh speakers in a considered way.

During the event held to announce the 2025 Eisteddfod in Wrexham, there was no explanation of what was happening, and no context for those who were not already aware of the culture of the Eisteddfod. This led people to ask: "What's going on?" and "What's all this about?" When marketing events, we must ensure that we are promoting the range of what is on offer when people buy a ticket, given that the cost of entry can be a barrier to attending, especially for those who are not aware of what is included.

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

See our response to question 5 above.

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

The 'Cymraeg 2050' strategy and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 emphasise the aim of ensuring the prosperity of the Welsh language in our communities. In light of this, we believe that sustaining the Welsh language in our communities should be a strategic goal and central principle of any new schemes that are recommended locally.

During the early years of a child's life, Welsh language transmission through the family and the household (and through early years care services) is central to the future and viability of the Welsh language. Parents, families and early years practitioners need to be encouraged and supported to transmit the language to children. We feel that Cymraeg for Kids groups, the Cylchoedd Meithrin and the Cylchoedd Ti a Fi throughout Wales are

community resources that contribute to maintaining vibrant Welsh communities and promoting the use of Welsh across Wales.

Funding cuts affect us all, and we see local authorities having to prioritise statutory services within their current budgets. This has led to a reduction in the funding that is available to employ specialist officers to work with Cylchoedd Ti a Fi. In order to continue providing these valuable local experiences, long-term investment is needed to fund a paid organiser for the Cylchoedd Ti a Fi.

The main aim of the Cymraeg for Kids programme is to increase the number of children in Welsh-medium education and care. The objectives of the programme are to support parents, parents-to-be and other family members to introduce and use the Welsh language within the home, to transmit the Welsh language to their children, and to support children's linguistic development, both socially and educationally. This is done through a diverse programme of baby groups, including baby massage, baby yoga, story, song and signing sessions, and *Fi a Fy Mabi* ('Me and My Baby') sessions, which are specifically designed for parents in the pre-natal period. With the costs associated with maintaining these services on the rise, the knock-on effects are a reduction in the offer on the ground and cuts in the number of officers employed. Further investment in the programme is required, so that parents and families across Wales can benefit from this support.

We must also consider research that suggests that it is the mother's language that is the best predictor of a child's linguistic development. The (latest) census data support this, and show that the probability of Welsh language transmission to the next generation within mixed-language families is 10% higher in families where the mother speaks Welsh. There is a need to consider dedicated interventions to work with Welsh-speaking fathers in mixed-language families.

We need to pay greater attention to the impact and significance of gender through actions that are all beneficial. In respect of families where both parents are Welsh speakers, we must also bear in mind the fact that 20% of them decide not to speak Welsh to their children, for whatever reason. In discussing efforts to persuade and influence people, appropriate targeting is vital, and we need to consider age, ethnic background, religion, and gender in doing this.

Wales has always been home to a very broad-ranging cross-section of people, but this hasn't always been reflected in the visual and literary representations of the Welsh language. One of the many challenges that we face is ensuring that support is provided to Welsh-speaking voices in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or Global Majority communities. Mudiad Meithrin already operates in this space through the AwDUron and AwDUra schemes, in partnership with 'Lily Translates' (and the author Jessica Dunrod), and through the publication of a number of dedicated early years resources:

- 'Cylch i Bawb', which comprises an introduction and resources that encourage early years settings to implement the concept that being inclusive means more than just demonstrating awareness of special needs; it also calls on us to nurture an appreciation of children's diverse cultural, religious and social backgrounds.
 - 'Nodau Natur', which puts an emphasis on celebrating the diversity of our diverse Welsh heritage. This is a combination of Welsh nursery rhymes and verse, and those in other languages linked to the various cultures that form part of contemporary Wales.
 - 'Cymru Ni', which celebrates the history of various Black people in Wales, seeking to fill the information gap that exists in terms of the Welsh-language resources that are suitable for young children.
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