

CFA25 Estyn

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: Estyn | Evidence from: Estyn

Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000¹ and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;

¹ This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Introduction

We agree that the lack of opportunities to hear and use the Welsh language outside school walls has an effect on children and young people's experiences of the Welsh language. This lack of opportunities includes the use of the Welsh language on digital platforms. In some areas, pupils travel long distances to access Welsh language education. In addition, youth services do not always have adequate Welsh-medium provision.

We agree that more needs to be done to develop the opportunities to use the Welsh language in areas where there are fewer speakers. Where events and experiences are organised, we recognise the positive effect this has on the confidence and ability of children and young people to use the language.

We urge the Welsh Government

- to work with local authorities to ensure that all children have access to Welsh-medium education within a reasonable distance of their home.
- to ensure that there is support for local authorities and the third sector to develop Welsh-medium play and youth provision so that there are extra-curricular and social opportunities to use the language.
- to ensure training and professional learning opportunities to support employees in the play and youth sector to understand and implement language acquisition strategies.
- to continue to monitor Local Authorities' Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plans by taking into account the number of pupils transferring from the early years sector to primary, primary to secondary and to post-16 education where there is an opportunity to study through the medium of Welsh.
- to ensure that there are meaningful opportunities for further education students, apprentices and adult learners in the community to follow courses through the medium of Welsh wherever they live in Wales. In addition, there is a need to ensure that the pedagogic and language skills of staff in these sectors are developed strategically in all areas, with the aim of moving learners up the pyramid or language continuum from their starting points.
- to continue to offer valuable opportunities for adults to acquire Welsh for work purposes through schemes in the Learn Welsh sector.

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?

- Evidence from our surveys suggests that there are not enough opportunities for pupils to hear and use the Welsh language in social contexts beyond the school walls, particularly in
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areas where there are fewer Welsh speakers. This has an effect on pupils' confidence in using the Welsh language verbally and on their perception of the value and relevance of Welsh as a living and viable language in their everyday lives. Often, in areas where there are fewer Welsh speakers, English is the household and social language used by children and young people with their peers.

- There is not always easy access to Welsh-medium nursery and school education provision. In some areas where less Welsh is spoken, pupils face long journeys to the nearest Welsh language provider. Creating a community atmosphere where events are held for parents and children attending a Welsh-medium school or nursery is therefore more difficult and depends on factors such as public transport routes.
- In these areas, there is not always a centre or focal point for the Welsh language so that there are opportunities for pupils to socialise through the medium of Welsh outside school hours and during the holidays. Often, local authority youth services do not have Welsh-medium provision. This can create a sense that Welsh is a marginal and unimportant language.
- With the growth of streaming platforms in the world of broadcasting, fewer people are receiving news and information about Wales and their local area. In addition, the algorithms of platforms such as Facebook mean that they accept British news stories. This means that they have very little awareness of Wales and the Welsh language. The Welsh language is not evident on platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook.
- In terms of post-16 education, we see that it is colleges and apprenticeship providers that have more positive approaches towards the Welsh language and have effective self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes that succeed best in developing their staff's bilingual language skills and pedagogy, as well as planning purposefully to develop the use of the Welsh language, in general. As a result, the picture across the country, including areas with fewer Welsh speakers, is not consistent.
- There are not enough opportunities for learners in the adult learning in the community sector to improve or use their language skills through Welsh-medium courses. (Language learning courses in the Learn Welsh sector are not referred to in this context).

What can be done to change this?

- Ensure that the Welsh language is heard at regular events or in specific places in areas where there are fewer Welsh speakers through sponsoring language initiatives, Welsh language organisations and the work of local authorities.
 - Continue to monitor local authorities' progress against their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.
 - Consider how to support extra-curricular activities of Welsh and English schools to encourage greater participation in the Welsh language and to foster a sense that the language is relevant and belongs to everyone.
 - Ensure that local authority youth services build capacity to offer more Welsh-medium provision. This can be achieved by creating partnerships with organisations such as the Urdd. However, this can lead to the concept that the Welsh language is something that specialist organisations do rather than something that is integrated and normalised within
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their own services. It is very important for services to use and develop the human resources they already have. We have seen, in inspections of youth provision, examples of Welsh-speaking youth workers who are not being used strategically to increase the use of the language when engaging with young people.

- Ensure that professional learning opportunities that are provided for employees within the sectors providing play, youth or Welsh language events, understand and use language acquisition strategies.
- Ensure that more Welsh-medium material appears in the media and when using technology to normalise the language. Encourage this at a national and local level.
- Adult learning in the community partnerships need to work more effectively with organisations such as the Mentrau iaith, Merched y Wawr etc who already run Welsh-medium courses and work with them strategically to increase the offer. Where this is happening, the Welsh-medium offer to the public is strengthening.

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?

- Plan more regular activities through the medium of Welsh during school holidays for children and young people, possibly under the auspices of, or co-ordinated by, the language initiatives. There is a need to normalise the Welsh language in young people's everyday lives, for example through Welsh-medium play schemes with a focus on language feeding and encouraging children and young people to use Welsh outside school. It would be possible to co-ordinate with partners such as local authority youth services and the Urdd to ensure a co-ordinated and comprehensive programme. Spaces with equipment for children and young people, for example play areas, libraries, youth cafes.
- School buildings (after school hours or during the holidays) and leisure centres to promote the idea of community and take part in activities through the medium of Welsh to build confidence.
- Using public spaces is beneficial, for example places where it is possible to meet over coffee or drink so that there is a social and comfortable element.
- Using a play park or outdoor space during the summer months, for example Angharad Park, Dyffryn Alyn Country Park (Wrexham). Focus on arranging an opportunity to chat and develop confidence.
- Using public/flexi buses to pick up people for activities and take them home.

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?

- Through our inspection work, we see examples of initiatives and activities that have encouraged the use of the Welsh language over a period of time. There are obvious examples in Pontypridd following the National Eisteddfod and Powys following the Meifod Eisteddfod 2024.
- Some schools work together to hold Welsh-medium events in their areas. For example, Ysgol Pen y Dre holds an Eisteddfod for its partner primary schools in order to promote the Welsh language.
- There are examples where schools take advantage of local events to promote the Welsh language with pupils and their families. For example, Prestatyn and Wrexham St David's Day Parades, Rhondda Eisteddfod.
- In some areas where Welsh language music festivals are held, organisers ensure that artists (bands or individuals performing in Welsh) visit schools in order to increase interest in the event.
- Inspection reports on the Welsh for Adults sector show that the Learn Welsh sector is effective in ensuring the use of the language outside lessons. Many learners use their language proactively in the community, at work, with the family etc. This is due to the sector's emphasis on developing oracy and creating active speakers rather than aiming to create learners who sit examinations only. Of course, this is easier in some areas, but we see consistently that many learners, even in areas with fewer Welsh speakers, use Welsh by attending events and societies in the community or by creating networks for learners to practise with each other.

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

- What is available in Welsh on popular platforms such as TikTok and Instagram could be increased by commissioning and supporting people to produce regular content. Cultural events could be highlighted as part of that. Content could be commissioned by festival and event organisers to be placed on digital platforms over time, for example short clips from the Maes Stage / gigs at Gŵyl Triban, Parti Ponty. Also, what already exists can be promoted, including Cyw and Hansh.
 - Ensuring that users know where to get information about the Welsh language and what is happening locally. What is being offered could be advertised more effectively, for example the work of the language initiatives.
 - Promoting useful websites such as the interactive map of festivals and events provided by 'awni.cymru'.
 - Consider how to ensure that streaming platforms, including material from Wales and about the Welsh language, to raise awareness of the language. Young consumers often rely entirely on streaming platforms and do not see TV adverts, Welsh and local news to normalise the language.
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- Using artificial intelligence to create content quickly could be beneficial. Material could be presented bilingually; the technology could be used to include translations or adapt text and content to suit different linguistic levels. For example, by creating short podcasts summarizing what is happening locally by feeding information about gigs, or opportunities to meet up to chat in Welsh and so on.
- Support organisations that share local news (online news sources) to help them promote the Welsh language and Welsh culture and advertise events that give people opportunities to hear and use the language.
- Promote the Welsh language learning provision that is available in order to raise awareness, including provision to develop individuals' confidence.
- Take advantage of opportunities to use digital tools and technology and social media to inform non-Welsh speaking parents of the benefits of Welsh language education when their children begin at settings that offer early care and education.
- For adults, learning Welsh or following Welsh-medium courses online creates valuable opportunities for people to use the language on a regular basis. There are benefits in terms of accessibility and ensuring sufficient numbers to maintain a viable classroom. However, the importance of linguistic interaction in face-to-face contexts should not be forgotten where there are opportunities for fluent and new learners to develop their language skills in ways that are not possible online.
- Estyn's thematic report on Welsh-medium and bilingual training schemes for the further education sector and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's apprenticeships refers to beneficial training on e-learning. The sessions show practitioners in these sectors what kind of Welsh and bilingual resources are available and how to use them to expand the use of the Welsh language. Similarly, Sgiliaith provision, mainly in online sessions, provides very useful advice for practitioners to incorporate the Welsh language into their work. Overall, we believe that the commercial value of the Welsh language within vocational qualifications and apprenticeships needs to be emphasised more effectively.
- There are notable examples of using the digital world to expand the use of the Welsh language. [The National Centre for Learning Welsh 2024 inspection report](#) shows that, following market research into young people's reasons for learning Welsh, the Centre has produced a multi-platform marketing campaign, that targets young people aged 16-25 specifically. Appropriate and appealing platforms were used to target them, using suitable influencers to market the benefits of learning Welsh. As a result of this marketing campaign, there was a 9% growth in the number of young people aged 16-25 who attended Learn Welsh lessons in 2022-23.

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 National Eisteddfod and Welsh-language festivals have a positive effect on the many opportunities that are available for children and young people to hear and use Welsh in areas where there are no significant numbers of speakers. These festivals often have a positive effect on people's attitudes towards the Welsh language over a period of time. This is often because many activities are organised to raise money or awareness of the event over a two-year period. It normalises the language in an area and often leaves a legacy, for example small Eisteddfodau and Welsh gigs. We see evidence of this in our inspections in primary and secondary schools and local authorities.
 - Activities at the National Eisteddfod, including Maes D, provide opportunities for learners to socialise and develop their fluency in a Welsh and Welsh language atmosphere. They can also find out more about the Welsh language learning offer that is available to them locally and nationally. Maes D's activities programme attracts fluent speakers and learners, for example through Maes D's music sessions. In addition, the diverse nature of the Eisteddfod means that there is something for everyone, from the Science Village, to the Pavilion and the Maes Stage. There is an attempt to attract learners through opportunities to compete and perform at the Eisteddfod's events. This has been seen in learner of the year competitions, choral competitions and local performances.
 - The Urdd Eisteddfod has a significant effect on promoting and raising awareness among children and their parents of Welsh culture and the Welsh language. The structure of the competition in district and county eisteddfodau means that there are opportunities across the areas of Wales to take part in cultural activities over a period of time. The Urdd provides excellent opportunities for children and young people to perform and compete on stage. In addition, there are opportunities to compete on a sports stage. The Urdd's activities are often mentioned by pupils as beneficial experiences when we ask for pupils' views in schools.
 - These cultural events give adults who are learning Welsh the opportunity to take part in activities through the medium of Welsh. The opportunities to raise money and steward at eisteddfodau are a valuable experience. In an inspection of Learn Welsh Morgannwg in November 2024, we found that the Learners' Choir, which was established for the Rhondda Cynon Taf Eisteddfod, was going from strength to strength
 - The touring nature of these festivals is crucial to ensuring that as many areas as possible in Wales experience the benefit of the National Eisteddfod or Urdd Eisteddfod. We see evidence of this in our inspections.
 - Welsh music festivals in areas where not as much Welsh is spoken are significant. In those cases where they are open festivals, there is an opportunity for everyone to hear music by Welsh bands. A good example is festivals such as Parti Ponty, Gŵyl Fel 'Na Mai and Gŵyl Ruthin which attract Welsh and English speakers. An event with a national profile such as Dydd Miwsig Cymru can have a major effect on the use of the Welsh language, with associated events across Wales.
 - Welsh-medium events provide opportunities for Welsh-medium schools to celebrate the language in their local area while ensuring opportunities for English-medium schools to expand the opportunities for pupils to learn about Welsh identity, culture and the Welsh language.
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6. How might these events (whether large or small in size) be adapted or improved to better serve communities with fewer Welsh speakers

- These events could be adapted or improved by ensuring better advertising about the content of the events as well as what is available to learners and non-Welsh speakers. For example, by advertising the availability of translation tools or sessions that include opportunities for speakers to gain confidence as well as emphasising the range of activities available.
- Establish a post-Eisteddfod arrangement to promote the legacy of the festival across Wales with a focus on the use of the Welsh language.
- Ensure that events are priced reasonably to attract families.
- Ensure the availability of events in areas such as the valleys and on the north-east coast so that there is transport and access to all communities over time.
- Ensure that there is positive publicity for events in communities where there are fewer Welsh speakers including smaller scale events. For example, activities in centres such as Saith Seren (Wrexham), Gwesty Owain Glyndŵr (Corwen), Tŷ Tawe (Swansea).
- Promote the use of online events or broadcast events online in order to reach a wider audience.

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?

- A recommendation to develop Welsh language skills was made in 18.9% (49) of primary school inspections in 2023-2024. 32% (10) of secondary schools received a recommendation to improve Welsh language provision in 2023-2024. A recommendation regarding the Welsh language was given to 13 non-maintained nursery settings (14%). This underlines the importance of providing opportunities for children and young people to develop their confidence and skills in activities and events.
 - School leaders are not always aware of the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plans' targets.
 - Local authorities do not always set sufficiently challenging targets for the development of the Welsh language in their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. They do not always provide sufficient support to develop the Welsh language in English-medium schools.
 - In some areas, pupils are lost from Welsh-medium education as they transfer from one provider to another. For example, in the Newport local authority inspection report, reference is made to losing pupils as they transition from early years settings to statutory education.
 - The opportunities to study post-16 courses or apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh vary widely across Wales, meaning that pupils from Welsh-medium schools do not have the opportunity to study in the language after year 11.
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