
CFA26 Urdd Gobaith Cymru

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: Urdd Gobaith Cymru | Evidence from: Urdd Gobaith Cymru

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?

We believe that children and young people need more opportunities to use the Welsh language outside the classroom.

Main Barriers:

There has been a lack of fair investment over the years, a lack of community language planning in building/setting up new schools, and a lack of awareness among officials, in terms of creating and supporting provision that encourages children and young people to use the Welsh language outside the classroom and in the community.

Strategic discussions regarding 'language use' have always been on the periphery of public sector discussions, and the emphasis has always been on education. It is vital that discussions regarding language use and culture are a priority for local authorities and the Welsh Government as we approach 2050, if we wish to see Welsh as a living language in our communities.

Cost – more often than not, people must pay to attend Welsh language activities outside the classroom. We must ensure that poverty is not a barrier for low income families and disadvantaged communities, in respect of Welsh language community opportunities for children and young people

Lack of local access – amid a lack of staffing resources (due to a lack of investment), the Urdd very often has to pick and choose one or two locations within a region to host Welsh language services for children and young people. This means that, for those who do not have access to transport, there is no way to

access Welsh language services as the provision is not convenient to reach. English language services do not always face the same challenges.

We lack a language use strategy and consistent monitoring. We welcome the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy and see the Urdd as a key partner in fulfilling this aim. We also praise the development and investment that has been seen in respect of Welsh education. However, in order to ensure that Welsh is a 'living language', where children and young people feel confident and use the language naturally, the creation of a language use strategy with clear targets and consistent monitoring is essential. In the absence of this, the opportunities for children and young people to use Welsh in their communities will be weak and fragmented. We must also nurture a better relationship between education and use. In expanding Welsh education within our communities, we must have a structure and fair investment so that we can create a 'Welsh' life outside the school walls.

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?

More than 160,000 children and young people access the Urdd's services throughout the year. By doing so, they have access to opportunities to use the Welsh language outside the classroom/college. 74% of the Urdd's members come from non-Welsh-speaking families and 25% are members of low-income families. As experts in the area of language use, with over 103 years of experience, we have a constructive relationship with more than 1090 schools and colleges, together with strong partnerships across all sectors. We are one of the largest employers operating through the medium of Welsh in the third sector in Wales, with a workforce of 416 (43% of whom are under the age of 25). Many of our young workers are former pupils of Welsh medium education in south-east Wales. Many of these lack confidence in their Welsh language skills when they start at the Urdd, but through support and opportunities to use the language in the office and out in the community, they become confident Welsh speakers.

In order to increase the use of Welsh among children and young people, we need to ensure the following:

- spaces and activities that are part of the consistent and regular schedule of children and young people's lives outside school.
 - more social provision on evenings/weekends and during school holidays.
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- provision that needs to be the 'equivalent' of what is available to children and young people in English (parity of service). For example, swimming lessons in Welsh.
- activities that should not be dependent on a self-sustaining funding model, where attendance fees must support all costs.
- the incorporation of children and young people's voices into the planning process, in order to ensure contemporary and diverse opportunities.
- investment in staff and their qualifications in order to be competitive in the market for activities outside the classroom.
- a strong post-16 structure of volunteering opportunities, where young people can practise their Welsh while pursuing qualifications and becoming part of the future workforce.
- Welsh-language apprenticeship pathways following the period of formal education. A high percentage of our apprentices are young people who have had a Welsh education but who lack confidence in their Welsh when they leave school. Apprenticeship opportunities have transformed these individuals' attitudes towards the Welsh language.
- the Urdd camps are very important 'language hubs' for encouraging Welsh language use and increasing the confidence of children and young people to speak Welsh. More than 103,000 camp attendees benefit from these important experiences annually. 26% of the schools that attend the camps are located in the most deprived wards in Wales, and 56% of the schools are located in communities outside our strongholds. 97% of schools that attend emphasise the fact that visits to our camps have fostered an extremely positive attitude among children and young people towards the Welsh language and Welsh culture.

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?

Here are some examples, provided under the auspices of the Urdd:

The Urdd apprenticeship scheme, which attracts Welsh speakers who lack confidence and non-Welsh speakers. XXXXXXXXXX Yusuf Billie and Hudhayfah Arish, who are former pupils of Fitzalan High School, were appointed as diversity and Inclusion apprentices, and they are pursuing an intensive Welsh language learning programme. They run sports clubs in Welsh through the Urdd in second-language schools.

Urdd week[ly] community sports clubs – 6,128 people attend on a weekly basis, and many activities are held in low density areas. These clubs are an important source of opportunities to use Welsh outside the classroom.

Weekly sports clubs for second language schools in disadvantaged areas, where the Welsh language is introduced. For example, the Urdd attends a number of schools in Cardiff South (the Southern Arc), including Mount Stuart Primary School. The Southern Arc project is an extremely successful venture that has also succeeded in attracting young volunteers from Fitzalan High School, who support this weekly provision and attend Welsh language lessons at the Urdd camp in Cardiff every Wednesday afternoon.

Outdoor project in south-east Wales – the Urdd Outdoor Service provides basic outdoor language courses for young people who are studying GCSE Welsh as a second language. This raises awareness about the Welsh language and increases pupils' confidence in using the Welsh language when conducting expeditions for the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

National volunteering opportunities with the Urdd – through the Urdd's volunteering opportunities, young people have the opportunity to use the Welsh language. For example, 60 volunteers at seven-a-side rugby events; opportunities to serve as *swogs* (officers) in summer camps; community day trips; international trips; district and county Eisteddfod events.

Community volunteering is an important part of the services provided by the Urdd. It remains a successful way of encouraging young people to use Welsh in their communities, along with gaining experience and obtaining qualifications. For example, [REDACTED], a girl from a non-Welsh-speaking family in [REDACTED] attended [REDACTED] and started volunteering with the Urdd at the age of 15. She became an apprentice at the age of 18, and is now a member of the Urdd's staff at the age of [REDACTED].

Our post-16 'themed' residential courses, held during the school / college holidays, continue to bring young people and different communities together to socialise in Welsh and to learn new skills. Significant progress has now been made, and a variety of courses are now on offer, including theatre, outdoor, digital media, sports, volunteering and music weekends.

More information about the Urdd Eisteddfod can be found in the response to question 6.

More information about the Urdd camps can be found in the response to question 2.

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?

The Urdd has adopted IT solutions to facilitate our systems and our communication with members, parents, guardians and stakeholders. We have invested significantly (more than £400k) in our IT infrastructure, namely in the PORTH and in CRM. This allows us to engage effectively in Welsh and bilingually with members, parents, guardians, schools and stakeholders, so that they can receive direct information about the Urdd's provision for children and young people. We have also built an Eisteddfod app to provide information about all of the activities on offer during Urdd Eisteddfod week in a convenient and accessible way for confident Welsh speakers and new speakers of the language.

Our Head of Technology has contributed to the comments below.

We see five steps whereby technology can be used to boost Welsh language use:

- I. Simplifying the use of Welsh on phones, computers and everyday apps
 - Ensuring that Welsh language options are available and easy to find
 - Removing barriers to typing in Welsh, such as a lack of basic features (spell-checking, "predictive text")
 - Ensuring that it is possible to use Welsh when communicating with voice assistants (Siri, Alexa)
 - Improving the quality of Welsh AI

 - II. Offering convenient ways for people to practise speaking Welsh
 - Using language learning apps and their AI features (Duolingo), which allow people to build confidence by practising conversations in private and without pressure

 - III. Collaborating closely with technology companies
 - Collaborating with large companies such as Apple and Google to integrate the Welsh language into core systems and popular apps that are used every day
 - Providing incentives for technology companies to include Welsh language support in their new products immediately
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- More broadly, increasing the availability of the Welsh language across major software providers and apps that are widely used by the public, such as Stripe and Paypal – two widely used payment platforms

IV. Modernising current Welsh language software

- Investing in essential Welsh software (Cysill, Cysgeir) to make it modern, easy to use, and available on popular platforms (Word online, Google Docs)

V. Providing more exciting and relevant Welsh content online

- Creating attractive videos, websites and digital experiences that appeal to all, thereby encouraging people to spend time using the Welsh language online

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?

The Urdd Eisteddfod

We see a significant increase in participation when the Eisteddfod travels across Wales. The number of competitors almost doubles (in the Maldwyn/Montgomery region in 2023, 6,000 people competed; in the Maldwyn/Montgomery region in 2024, 11,000 competed. In West Glamorgan in 2024, 6,000 competed; in 2025, 12,000 competed).

Adults and young people are offered volunteering opportunities, meaning that they have opportunities to use the language and see and hear Welsh as a living language.

Impact on the language

Our surveys show the following:

- 89% agree that taking part in the Urdd Eisteddfod increases a person's confidence
 - 90% agree that taking part in the Urdd Eisteddfod increases pride in the culture of Wales and the Welsh language
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- 86% agree that taking part in the Urdd Eisteddfod is a good way to learn the Welsh language

Increasing numbers of young Welsh learners

15% of the Urdd's competitors are Welsh learners, or those who are completely new to the language. The Urdd Eisteddfod has witnessed an annual increase of 10% in the number of Welsh learners who are taking part in the festival.

We have seen a 30% increase in the number of learners competing at the Urdd Eisteddfod between 2023 and 2025, when going to an area with a lower density of Welsh speakers.

Community impact

The Urdd Eisteddfod is not just a week-long affair. It is two years of preparation and community activities that bring individuals and communities together to celebrate and use the Welsh language.

Widening Access

Through the Welsh Government's support in offering free entry to members of low-income households, 45% of Urdd Eisteddfod visitors who claimed a free ticket for low-income households were visiting the Eisteddfod for the first time. 22% of children and young people involved in the Urdd are from low-income households.

A free entry scheme is key to attracting schools that are not normally involved in the Urdd Eisteddfod. One head teacher said: "Pupils at our school, and their families, have been able to access this scheme to experience the Eisteddfod for the very first time, and this has provided opportunities for more children to enjoy and learn through immersive experiences. Without a doubt, the scheme bolsters the sense of belonging to a Welsh-speaking community."

Non-Welsh households viewing competitions on S4C and social media – the Urdd Eisteddfod is broadcast on S4C and on social media platforms, with 59 broadcasting hours and 4.19 million viewers watching Urdd Eisteddfod content on social media platforms.

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

We want the experience of attending the Urdd Eisteddfod to be positive and open to all in order to ensure a sense of belonging in respect of the Welsh language, whatever the language journey of the individuals involved, and to encourage them to use the Welsh language.

The annual cost of hosting the Urdd Eisteddfod is £2.7 million, with the Welsh Government making a contribution of 13%. We are keen to continue improving the experience for visitors who are less confident in their Welsh language skills, and we acknowledge that it is necessary to do so. However, the current financial landscape poses challenges in terms of achieving this.

To improve the experience, we need the following:

- Additional financial investments to enhance the resources available to visitors who have never attended an Eisteddfod and / or learners, so that they can better understand the Eisteddfod experience and have a positive experience at the festival.
- More opportunities for learners to compete and perform, and efforts to attract individuals and groups who would not normally compete.
- The formalisation of a 'buddy system' for new learners and visitors who are experiencing the Eisteddfod for the first time.
- Ongoing evolution of, and investment in, the Urdd Eisteddfod app, which facilitates positive experiences for new visitors to the Urdd Eisteddfod.

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 Urdd is a key partner in attaining the Cymraeg 2050 target, and it supports the Welsh Language and Education Bill as the main catalyst for creating new Welsh speakers.

Despite this, we feel that discussions on fair investment, on creating opportunities, and on encouraging use of the Welsh language among children and young people are peripheral. We would therefore welcome a 'strategy for use' outside education hours to accompany the Cymraeg 2050 strategy, with quantitative targets set and monitored annually.

Our 'Urdd i Bawb/Urdd for All' strategy for 2023-2028 outlines the Urdd's aims and objectives for the next five years. It focuses on inclusion and ensuring that the Urdd is accessible to all children and young people in Wales, regardless of

their cultural and economic background, their ability or their linguistic status. It recognises the ongoing commitment of the organisation to serve our core members, but also identifies the need to focus on the demographics of children and young people who are underrepresented (socially), including those living in poverty, Welsh learners, ethnic minorities, those with disabilities or additional learning needs, and those in the LGBT+ community.

We evaluate our strategy annually, and we are confident that we are reaching out to a wider landscape of children and young people, seeking to get them involved in the Urdd and the Welsh language.

Our aim is to see more children and young people engaging with the language in their communities, and to ensure that money is not a barrier to accessing Welsh language provision.
