



The largest teachers' union

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE:

Welsh teaching in primary schools

About NUT Cymru:

NUT Cymru represents primary and secondary school members and is the largest teaching union in Wales and the UK. We welcome the opportunity to contribute views to the petition committee's evidence gathering exercise.

The Petition:

'We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to make all primary schools in Wales taught through the medium of Welsh. If we and the Welsh Assembly are truly committed to restoring the Welsh language and creating a bilingual Wales then action is required. I agree this is something that cannot be done overnight there are issues such as teacher numbers and transition between changing the schools from English to Welsh medium. The Welsh Assembly have emphasised the importance of having communities of Welsh speakers. This will only occur if the majority of children leaving school over many generations can speak fluently in Welsh.'

We call for the Welsh Government to draft a preliminary plan of action and timetable of how such a change could in theory occur.'

NUT Cymru Response:

As a union NUT Cymru are fully committed to the use of Welsh. Our office operates a bilingual policy and members are able to access information, guidance and support through the medium of Welsh.

We represent a significant number of Welsh language teachers operating both in Welsh medium and English schools.

In recent years the union has helped increase Welsh language participation amongst teachers by providing a Welsh language course which caters for individuals of all standards, from absolute beginners to those who wish to refresh their Welsh language skills. We are proud to say that individuals who had previously limited Welsh language skills, but who undertook our Welsh language training courses, have gone on to secure appointments in Welsh language schools.

The take up of the above course and its popularity has been extremely positive and does suggest there is an appetite amongst the existing profession to access high quality Welsh language training. However, while our commitment to the language is a core objective of the unions work, we do have reservations about the proposal put forward by the petition.

Parental choice:

We may wish to see the Welsh language thrive but there are parents who have made a conscious decision not to send their children to a Welsh language school. We suspect that making teaching through the medium of Welsh compulsory for all lessons at primary level could in fact create resentment towards the language and become counter-productive. It would be far more beneficial to engage parents as to the positives of learning the language and to see it grow organically as a result.

Supportive but non-Welsh speaking parents could become alienated as they will not have the linguistic skills to support their pupils (already an issue in Key Stage 3 schools teaching through the medium of Welsh). How, for example, will they support their children in listening to them reading?

English as additional language (EAL) pupils, who are only staying for a year or two in this country, will be done a disservice as English will be a much more transferable skill when they return home or move on.

We have to question if we will see pupils being withdrawn from schools on the border to English schools which are already better resourced and which, following the previous Minister's criticism of the education service and the most recent Estyn report, may already be perceived as more successful ?

Also we question how this will prepare pupils for Key Stage 3 in a more linguistically mixed secondary sector.

Capacity:

Currently, as acknowledged by the petition, the capacity is not there to ensure this could become a reality. The fact is we are a very long way off having the amount of Welsh speaking teachers to achieve such an aim.

What should also be taken into account when considering the issue of capacity is the fact that we are already struggling to recruit graduates with specialities in specific subjects, e.g. physics, mathematics or chemistry. Filling these posts and attracting graduates with backgrounds in these subjects must be a priority before specifying a Welsh language provision. While subject specialism is not as apparent an issue for primary school teachers as it is for secondary there is still a need to target the right skill sets. Placing a language barrier on the profession may very well lead to greater difficulties in making teaching a desirable role for individuals with qualifications and experience in areas currently lacking in Welsh schools.

Impact:

There is a concern that setting the ability to speak Welsh as a core requirement for teaching could deter not only talented individuals from considering the profession but also individuals who wish to learn the language.

Some teachers who are working within the English medium system do take up Welsh through short-term courses, such as those provided by the NUT, or by taking a sabbatical. This is an excellent way in which to access professional development and learn the language while being a teacher. In turn those individuals are able to bring those new language skills back into the classroom. They are often champions of the language and support the confidence of fellow teachers or pupils in also learning Welsh. However, this language support isn't available to those who have yet to enter the sector. There is a big question as to if such individuals would have considered teaching had they been expected to learn Welsh first. Not only would they not have had the same opportunity to learn Welsh they would have been lost to the profession as standalone teachers regardless of language.

There is a case to extend and better resource the sabbatical programme. Access to the scheme is variable across Wales. Ideally a funding commitment should

be examined to ensure it is more readily available for those that wish to take advantage of it. Allowing practitioners that wish to learn Welsh, or improve their Welsh, to immerse themselves in the language for a defined period of time would be hugely beneficial to ensuring proficiency exists across institutions

It is also worth noting the Education Minister did accept option 1:13 of the ‘future for education delivery’ consultation that stated the Welsh Government should;

‘Invite the review of Welsh second language teaching that is already under way to consider:

- *extending the use of immersion groups and secondments to Welsh-medium schools to boost the language skills of teachers teaching Welsh as a second language*
- *Whether or not functional skills in Welsh should form part of the core requirement.’*

Progress on this option may be something the committee would like to pursue as an ongoing matter with the Welsh Government.

Finally in terms of impact we would also question how this proposal will influence school standards in Wales. There is consistent evidence that shows the standard of teaching is the primary driver for educational attainment.

If a requirement to have all teachers operating in the primary sector fluent in Welsh is introduced there is a potential that high quality candidates for teachers training could be rejected, or dissuaded from applying. This could be on the basis that they are not Welsh speakers or even that they simply do not have the confidence that their standard of Welsh is of a high enough quality.