

National Assembly for Wales
Children, Young People and Education Committee
CYPE(4)–20–15 – Paper 1
Welsh in Education Strategic Plans
Evidence from : Welsh Government

Introduction

1. In April 2010 the Welsh Government published its Welsh-medium Education Strategy aimed at improving the status and planning of Welsh-medium education, and at improving standards in Welsh (both first and second language) as a subject. The Strategy articulated the Welsh Government's vision thus:

“...to have an education and training system that responds in a planned way to the growing demand for Welsh-medium education, reaches out to and reflects our diverse communities and enables an increase in the number of people of all ages and backgrounds who are fluent in Welsh and able to use the language with their families, in their communities and in the workplace.”

2. The Strategy includes fixed five-year and indicative ten-year targets based on outcomes. Tangible progress against these targets would then be measured within a more effective, accountable and coherent planning system. Central to this planning system is the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

3. The first WESPs, prepared by local authorities and submitted to Welsh Ministers from 2012, were on a non-statutory basis. As such, Welsh Ministers could not formally approve, modify or reject them since there were no statutory provisions in place to enable them to do so. However, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provided local authorities with detailed feedback and face to face discussions about the Plans. Local authorities responded favourably to this process and amended their WESPs accordingly. This proved a useful preparation for the advent of statutory Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

4. Part 4 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 places the WESPs on a statutory basis. The Act defines a WESP as a plan which contains

“(a) a local authority's proposals on how it will carry out its education functions to —

(i) improve the planning of the provision of education through the medium of Welsh (“Welsh medium education”) in its area;

(ii) improve the standards of Welsh medium education and of the teaching of Welsh in its area;

(b) the local authority's targets for improving the planning of the provision of Welsh medium education in its area and for improving the standards of that education and of the teaching of Welsh in its area;

(c) a report on the progress made to meet the targets contained in the previous plan or previous revised plan.”

5. In brief, a local authority is under a duty to prepare a plan explaining how it will improve the planning of Welsh-medium education, and improve standards, together with its targets for improvement and progress reports. The Act also sets out the arrangements which a local authority must make in terms of public consultation about the Plan, its submission to Welsh Ministers and the subsequent publication of the approved WESP.

6. Welsh Ministers’ functions in relation to a WESP are to approve a plan as submitted, approve it with modifications, or reject it and prepare another plan which is to be treated as the authority’s approved plan. Where Welsh Ministers propose to modify or reject a plan they must consult the local authority. In practice, consultation has taken the form of a formal letter outlining the proposed modifications to which the local authority must respond within 14 days.

7. The provisions of the Act are further amplified by the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013. In brief, these Regulations more detailed arrangements for conducting a Welsh-medium education assessment (to measure demand), the duration of a plan, its form and content, its submission to Welsh Ministers, the timing and manner of publication, further provisions as regards consultation, and the review of a plan. They also set out in more detail the matters to be dealt with in a plan.

Matters to be dealt with in a Plan

8. The Department for Education and Skills has issued guidelines to local authorities about the contents of a WESP reflecting both the requirements of the Regulations and the priorities of Welsh-medium Education Strategy. Plans, which therefore, cover 7 broad areas/outcomes:

Outcome 1: More seven-year-old children being taught through the medium of Welsh

Among the issues which local authorities must address are plans for increasing the numbers in Welsh-medium education; the processes for measuring demand for Welsh-medium childcare and statutory education provision; links to the 21st Century School programme; arrangements for immersion schemes and latecomers; the establishment of a Welsh-medium Education Forum; information to parents; and how the local authority discharges its duty under section 10 of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to promote access to Welsh-medium education and training through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 2: More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school

This outcome focusses on the arrangements for increasing the percentage of Year 9 pupils assessed in Welsh as a first language together with developing more effective transfer arrangements from early years/childcare through to Key Stage 4 with a particular emphasis on linguistic continuity.

Outcome 3: More learners aged 14 to 16 studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh

Outcome 4: More learners aged 16 to 19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh in schools, colleges and work-based learning

These outcomes are taken together. In the case of Outcome 3 the focus is on increasing the percentage of learners in Year 11 studying for 5 or more qualifications through the medium of Welsh. In the case of Outcome 4 the focus is on 2 or more subjects through the medium of Welsh. In both cases, local authorities are expected to explain how they support schools in maximising the take-up of subjects through the medium of Welsh, and how they work with others e.g. the 14 -19 Networks and Regional Forums.

Outcome 5: More learners with higher skills in Welsh

The main emphasis here is on standards – of literacy and numeracy, and in performance in Welsh as a first language and Welsh as a second language in statutory teacher assessments and external examinations across the Key Stages. Local authorities are expected to set targets for each. Local authorities are also expected to report on how they will reduce the percentage of non-entries for an external examination in Welsh as a second language at the end of Key Stage 4. In addition, local authorities are asked to outline how it encourages the use of Welsh outside the classroom. This is the Outcome to which the regional consortia make the greatest contribution.

Outcome 6: Welsh-medium provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs

Among the issues which local authorities need to consider are how they assess additional learning needs in the Welsh-medium sector, the extent to which they are able to offer services and support through the medium of Welsh, and the strategies for bridging any gaps between identified needs and range of services on offer through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 7: Workforce Planning and Continuous Professional Development

This is primarily about strategies for securing sufficient numbers of practitioners with the requisite linguistic and methodological skills to deliver Welsh-medium education, including the use of the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme.

Progress to date

9. The first statutory WESPs covering the period 2014 to 2017 were submitted to Welsh Ministers in December 2013 (as required by statute). 3 Plans were approved as submitted and 19 Plans were approved with modifications.

10. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013 require a local authority, no later than 20 December every year, to review its progress against the targets in its approved Plan and submit any revised Plan for approval by Welsh Ministers. The functions of Welsh Ministers in respect of a revised Plan are limited to approval as submitted or approval with modifications. 5 were approved as submitted and 17 with modifications.

11. In accordance with the 2013 Regulations local authorities will undertake a further review of their progress against targets and submit their revised Plans to Welsh Ministers by 20 December 2015. This will provide the Department for Education and Skills with a further opportunity to challenge local authorities on both the implementation of individual plans and their continuing progress towards meeting their targets.

12. Local authorities have had 3 years in which to develop and refine their WESPs but the extent to which Ministerial approval has required modifications suggests that there is still some way to go before they are sufficiently embedded in local authority processes to contribute more effectively to the targets and outcomes of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy.

13. The Government views the introduction of WESPs as an important component in creating the system necessary to improve both the planning for, and standards of Welsh-medium education. Whilst this mechanism has been accepted by local authorities, it is too early to judge the impact of the Plans, especially as the initial approval of WESPs and then the revised Plans has involved considerable modifications.

Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans

Question 1

Will the Welsh Government meet the 2015 and 2020 targets set out in the Welsh Medium Education Strategic Plan?

We have already acknowledged in the last two Annual Reports on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy that we would be unlikely to meet all the 2015 targets. Against that background, it seems unlikely that those targets which will not be met in 2015 will also be met in 2020 without improved planning and action at local authority level.

However, as reported in the Annual Report on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy last year progress has been made against some of the targets and that the 2015 target to increase the number of learners aged 16–19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh in further education colleges and work-based learning was achieved.

Question 2

Can you demonstrate how **WESPs have** contributed towards meeting the targets, particularly in relation to:

- More seven-year-old children being taught through the medium of Welsh;
- More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school;
- More learners studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh;
- More learners aged 16–19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh, in schools, colleges and work-based learning; and
 - More learners with higher-level Welsh-language skills.

The most recent Annual Report on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy, published in July 2014, indicated that for these specific targets:

- 22.4% of seven-year-old learners being taught through the medium of Welsh compared with the 2009 baseline of 21%.
- 17% of learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school compared to the 2009 baseline of 16% (measured as a percentage of Year 9 learners assessed in Welsh First Language). It should be noted that linguistic progression is very good between ages seven and 11 with the



cohort assessed at age 11 being over 97 per cent of that assessed four years earlier, at the age of seven. However, the situation is very different between the ages of 11 and 13. Data suggest that about 13.6% of learners assessed in Welsh first language at the age of 11 that are not similarly assessed aged 14. In order to reach the 2015 target, local authorities collectively will need to focus on reducing this discontinuity. The challenge remains in the two consortia with the highest numbers in Key Stage 2, and in specific local authority areas within these consortia, such as Carmarthenshire. However, increases in the number of 14 year old learners assessed in Welsh First Language were evidenced in Denbighshire, Powys, Ceredigion and Neath Port Talbot. Ensuring effective linguistic progression between key stage 2 and 3 is very much a local matter. It will depend on both parental and pupil attitudes, the encouragement of key teachers especially those involved in transition and the internal organisation of the secondary school in terms of language streams. In 2012 the Welsh Government published guidance aimed primarily at schools and local authorities entitled "Promoting Linguistic Progression between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3"

- 81.6% of learners entered for GCSE First Language entered for at least two further Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications through the medium of Welsh compared with the 2009 baseline of 80.9%. The equivalent figure for those entered for at least five Welsh-medium subjects was 55.5% compared to the 2009 baseline of 58.4%. While the 2015 target was met for both indicators in 2012, the most recent figures appear to have been affected by an increasing number of learners studying vocational subjects such as BTEC. These courses are continually assessed but Welsh-medium data is not collected by the awarding bodies.
- 20.1% of students aged 16 -19 studying through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in schools compared with the 2007-08 baseline of 14.9%. This is above the target of 20% for 2020. The equivalent figure for colleges is 8.4% which is in excess of the 2015 target of 7%; and for work-based learning 3.6% against a 2015 target of 2.5%.
- The indicators for more students with higher level Welsh language skills are the total A Level Welsh First and Welsh Second Language entries as percentages of the GCSE entries two years earlier. In the case of First Language the latest figure is 5.9% against a 2015 target of 7%, and for Second Language 1.9% against a 2015 target of 3.5%.

The next Annual Report on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy will be published in July 2015



Question 3

How effective are local authorities at assessing levels of need for Welsh-medium education provision? How effective are WESPs in contributing to that process?

Local authorities are asked to explain how they will adopt systematic processes for measuring the demand for Welsh-medium childcare and Welsh-medium statutory educational provision. It is the Government's view that this should be by means of a bespoke survey consisting of the core questions which are set out in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013. Where an authority carries out such an assessment the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 requires them to take the finding into account when preparing or revising its WESP.

The 2013 Regulations include provisions for Welsh Ministers to require a local authority to conduct one in certain specified circumstances.

The majority of local authorities have conducted, or have committed themselves to conducting, a survey of parental demand during the lifetime of the current Plans 2014 -17.

Question 4

How has Welsh Government ensured that WESPs have resulted in increased (or different) provision being delivered at a local authority level (where such a need is identified)?

The provision of sufficient school places remains the responsibility of local authorities. Local authority and schools receive support to improve standards of education and pupil achievement from regional consortia. Therefore, change will occur as local authorities, schools and regional consortia collect and use the relevant information and respond accordingly to need.

WESPs provide them with a mechanism for exploring and identifying particular needs with regard to Welsh-medium education and to outline actions to address these needs. It allows for close and careful scrutiny at both local and national level

Question 5

How does the Welsh Government monitor and review progress, and ensure local authorities are complying with the requirements of WESPs?



Each local authority is required to prepare a WESP covering a 3-year period. The first statutory Plans are for the period 2014 to 2017. These Plans were assessed by my Department. Welsh Ministers functions in relation to a WESP are to approve it as submitted, to approve it with modifications or to reject it and prepare another plan which is to be regarded as the local authority's approved plan.

Where Welsh Ministers are minded either to approve a plan with modifications or to reject a plan they are required to consult the local authority. In practice, this means providing the local authority with a written response outlining the required modifications. Local authorities are required to respond within 14 days with a copy of a modified plan which is then subject to a further assessment and, if acceptable, approved.

Local authorities are required to review progress against targets annually - by 20 December each year – and to revise the plan accordingly. The revised plans are subject to the same assessment process as that outlined above save that Welsh Ministers can only approve a revised plan with or without modifications..

Question 6

Is the Minister satisfied that the process for reviewing WESPs is sufficiently transparent (with particular reference to the fact that local authorities are not required to publish an Annual Report detailing the outcomes of their reviews)? In what ways could the process be made more transparent?

Yes. Local authorities are required to consult about revised plans in accordance with statutory requirements and to publish the revised plans when they have been approved by Welsh Ministers. To require local authorities to publish an annual report in addition to this would be unnecessarily burdensome.

Question 7

What mechanisms are in place to ensure that WESPs reflect all relevant Welsh Government policies and legislation, including

- Learner travel legislation and policy;
- 21st Century Schools programme;
- Planning policy;



- A living language: a language for living – Moving forward policy statement; and
- Flying Start.

There is always a challenge in creating a system such as the WESPs which will be able to reflect the current educational policy agenda and allow for the duties imposed to enable effective responses to policy imperatives. A common planning mechanism such as the WESP does allow for the drawing together of policy and operational strands which impinge upon the planning and provision of Welsh-medium education.

Local authorities in their WESPs are required to demonstrate how they use the information gleaned from Childcare Sufficiency Assessments to plan for expansion of Welsh-medium childcare in order to feed into Welsh-medium education. In this context, the planning and provision of Welsh-medium Flying Start places is vital. Local authorities are also required to indicate how they have built planning for additional Welsh-medium school places into their Strategic Outline Programme for 21st Century Schools Funding. Similarly, scrutiny of 231st Century Schools Funding submissions involved examining how they align with their Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Local authorities are also required to show how they comply with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008.

In practice, we have seen some local authorities slow to engage with departments or teams who should be feeding into the preparation of the WESP. This has been reflected in the variability of the sections dealing with early years education indicating that the relevant officers have been involved to very different degrees. It has also been true of those officers dealing with learner transport matters. At times, submission for 21st Century Funding have included obsolete references as far as Welsh-medium education is concerned showing that officers responsible for the WESP have not always liaised with those taking forward Capital Funding applications.

Essentially, this question is about local authority structures and processes. While the disciplines of drawing up and implementing WESPs could – and should – have an influence on these, it is not the main function of the WESP process.

Question 8

How has the Welsh Government has ensured that WESPs are used to deliver equal access to welsh medium provision and equal outcomes for all pupils, for example

- welsh second language pupils;
- children from low income households; and
- pupils with additional learning needs.



The aim of WESPs is to ensure that parents and pupils can have access to Welsh-medium provision within reasonable distance if that is their preference, irrespective of where they live or their particular economic circumstances. We have also included a specific outcome in relation to additional needs so that, as far as possible, pupils with such needs are not deterred from choosing Welsh-medium education. Welsh-medium education is open to all. In essence, it is about enabling parents and pupils to make an informed choice. Whether they choose to enter the Welsh-medium sector or the English-medium sector, once they have made that choice we want them to have an education of high quality which enables them to reach their potential.

Question 9

In what ways could the current policy on WESPs be improved and how are those improvements being progressed?

Our policy on WESPs is clear: the statutory duty on local authorities to prepare, submit and revise WESPs will remain. The current WESPs for the period 2014 to 2017 are the first statutory plans. Our intention is not to make any significant changes to the requirements in terms of content until the end of this period. Local authorities will be required to prepare new 3-year plans for the period 2018 to 2021. We shall be considering what changes to the guidelines which might be required in readiness for the next round of plans. Changes to the content of WESPs may also require amendments to the Regulations.

Question 10

Please provide information on any other matters relating to WESPs that may assist the Committee in its work.

The Committee will wish to consider the written evidence which has been sent separately to the Committee Business mailbox.

