
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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Pwnc / Subject:	Estyn's response to the request by the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee for information regarding the inquiry into Welsh-medium education, with a specific focus on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

Background information about Estyn

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

Estyn's 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 2000 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, Estyn 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 education and training providers in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

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

Estyn may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, Estyn has 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;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Response

Introduction

The quality and ambition of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans varies greatly. The best are incisive, clear about their aims and provide certainty about action. Less successful plans have little ambition and implementation details. That being said, they are an improvement on previous plans.

On the whole, the requirements in terms of planning over a ten-year period is a positive step and aiming for specific targets in terms of the number of learners who are educated through the medium of Welsh in year 1 and the appropriate emphasis on pre-school education are sensible. Seeing the importance of early and late immersion is a very positive step and gives learners at different points of their educational journey an opportunity to become bilingual.

Co-operation across authorities is limited and even when it is highlighted in one authority's plan, plans of other neighbouring authorities do not give much acknowledgement to co-operation. Opportunities are also missed to expand and coordinate post-16 provision. Co-operation across authorities to ensure Welsh-medium ALN provision is more prominent in the plans, where applicable. Perhaps the main weakness is the weak comment about developing Welsh as a subject and as a medium in English-medium schools.

Consultation questions

The **Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee** are undertaking an inquiry into Welsh-medium education, with specific focus on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). This is a joint inquiry to explore how the statutory framework, established to promote planning and development of Welsh, medium education is working.

In order to inform the inquiry, Members would like to hear from you on the following questions:

- In December 2015, the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the Fourth Assembly published recommendations in its report '**Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans**'. Has the current statutory framework for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans improved since then?

In 2015, a review of the strategy was published on behalf of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. The report identified a number of recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of plans and, in particular, their effect. On the whole, the inquiry's recommendations have contributed to improving the quality of plans and have improved the likelihood that they will improve provision. Planning over a ten-year period has certainly allowed more strategic consideration of the steps that need to be taken and identifying specific targets to aim towards is a useful step.

It was identified that it was necessary to ensure that the strategy's targets are reflected in the Strategic Plans and that Government officials need to be more robust when approving the plans to ensure that they reflect the ambition of Welsh Government. It seems that the plans that have been submitted by authorities meet the targets in terms of the number of Year 1 pupils who are taught through the medium of Welsh. The ambition identified in the individual plans varies, but all at least meet the minimum target, as identified in the plans.

The consultation on school categorisation has been a positive step. Although there was some objection to the original proposals, the government responded to feedback, specifically by including a clearer definition of what is meant by a designated Welsh-medium school. However, most of the draft plans do not give specific attention to the proposed categories. This is partly because the final policy had not been published when local authority officers were preparing their early drafts.

The latest requirements include a clause that asks authorities to outline their plans to promote the Welsh language. The plans of each authority identify their intentions to promote the Welsh language in various ways. It is difficult for us to measure the quality and effect of this work at present.

The review identifies the importance of strengthening the roles of language forums in the process of leading the strategic plans. It has been identified that there is a lack of consistency in terms of implementation methods and membership. Evidence across Wales suggests that there has not been a great deal of change in the influence of language forums, on the whole. In the best cases, for example in Newport, forums are influential and challenging and play an important role in shaping and crafting the strategic plans.

The strategic role of the regional consortia is not a prominent element in the plans submitted by the authorities. There are references to the contribution of the consortia to the professional development of the education workforce in the context of the Welsh language, subject support in the secondary sector and preparing resources, for example for the immersion units. However, on the whole, there are very few references to the role of the consortia in supporting with purposeful linguistic planning across authorities in the regions. Authorities have been discussing and planning jointly in some cases; for example, in the southeast, Blaenau Gwent WESP refers to co-operation through the South East Wales Consortium (SEWC) when tracking and planning Welsh secondary education across county boundaries e.g., Ysgol Gwynllyw in Torfaen and when considering opening a secondary school to serve the Heads of the Valleys area.

- To what extent do Welsh in Education Strategic Plans contribute to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – **Cymraeg 2050**;

On the whole, the plans contribute positively to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – Cymraeg 2050. The

targets that have been set ensure that the numbers that will receive Welsh-medium education at the end of the life of the plans will meet the targets set by the Government. However, it must be borne in mind that only plans have been submitted and that there is a need to monitor and scrutinise how the plans are implemented over the decade, with the likelihood that there will be changes to the officers and elected members who will be responsible for steering the plans during that period.

- How are local authorities responding to changes to guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision, and are they meeting the Welsh Government's ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools?

The picture across Wales varies and this is due to some extent to the linguistic context and structural pattern of provision for Welsh-medium and English-medium education. For example, in the south and northeast, the norm is to have designated Welsh-medium and English-medium schools and there is very little variation to this procedure. In the north and southwest, there are complex patterns of designated Welsh-medium schools with a continuum of various arrangements of provision.

In the southeast, references to increasing Welsh-medium provision in mostly English-medium schools are limited. Plans identify aims to either fill the surplus places that already exist in the Welsh-medium education sector or open new provision in areas that are currently geographically far away from a cohort of pupils who may wish to access Welsh-medium education. For example, Bridgend Council plans to expand primary provision by relocating one school to a more accessible site, establishing a Welsh stream in an English-medium school and planning to open a new Welsh-medium school in the south-west of the county. There is no reference to encouraging other schools, whether primary or secondary, to move along the linguistic continuum. There are references to improving standards in Welsh as a subject and also to working with Bridgend College to increase provision, particularly its vocational courses. On the whole, the plans of the remainder of the authorities in the south and northeast are of a similar nature.

Newport has a plan which includes targets that are higher than those set by Welsh Government. The plan includes steps towards developing dual-stream schools, which is also part of Cardiff Council's vision when opening schools on new housing estates.

In authorities in the south and northwest, the picture is more mixed. Five authorities state clearly their aspiration to increase Welsh provision in schools that are mainly English-medium or that have Welsh streams. For example, Ceredigion identifies in its plan the steps towards ensuring that six of the seven secondary schools are category 3 during the life of the WESP. It identifies the actions towards realising these aims, for example by engaging with the governing bodies of those schools as part of the initial consultation and once the

plan is approved by the Council. This means a significant change in secondary provision in the authority. Gwynedd and Anglesey identify their high level aims to increase Welsh-medium provision in their secondary schools but without the details and certainty in terms of implementation seen in Ceredigion. Similarly, Carmarthenshire plans to change the linguistic category of a number of its primary schools that are currently dual-stream schools and also to build and expand Welsh-medium provision in the secondary schools across the authority. Pembrokeshire is a good example of an authority that is taking significant steps to increase Welsh-medium provision in the secondary and primary sectors. The steps are ambitious e.g., changing the language category of Ysgol Bro Gwaun, which will be a challenging and politically sensitive task. A number of authorities state that the targets need to be considered in the context of trends in the authority, which include a reduction in birth rates.

On the whole, where political will is strong, the change in categories has provided an opportunity to look afresh at ways of expanding Welsh language provision. A number of authorities have seized the opportunity, but others are satisfied with a more cautious approach and propose the minimum amount of change which, at best, meets the minimum requirements.

- What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision, ahead of a proposed Welsh Language Education Bill?

The main challenges will be to ensure sufficient staff with the necessary Welsh language skills of an appropriate standard to teach the medium subjects in our schools and pre-school providers. The strategy identifies this challenge and the government has recently published a paper analysing the challenge and proposing some actions.

On the whole, plans do not make specific enough links with the Welsh for Adults sector and the work of the National Centre for Learning Welsh. As a result, opportunities are missed in terms of working together to train the workforce and share good practice on effective pedagogy for acquiring the language.

The WESP in most authorities responds to the requirements fairly cautiously and conservatively. They meet the requirements in terms of the targets set by the government, but only a few authorities have taken the opportunity to push forward with things. Less ambitious authorities are satisfied with filling surplus places to meet the government's targets, often without considering the reasons for the surplus places.

The curriculum places an emphasis on developing pupils' oral skills but there are very few references in the strategic plans to how English-medium schools will improve this provision. Overall, this is the greatest weakness of the plans in areas where a majority of schools are English-medium.

Ensuring that learners are able to access Welsh-medium education at different stages of their educational journey is very important. Children's linguistic destiny

is too reliant on their parents' decision at the pre-school stage, but immersion provides a second chance to join the journey to becoming bilingual. Therefore, ensuring sufficient funding to establish and expand immersion provision is essential.

[Welsh Immersion Education - Strategies and approaches to support 3 to 11-year-old learners](#)

I would like to invite you to discuss these questions with Committee Members at a meeting from **10.40 – 11.40 on 6 July 2022**.

It would be helpful if you could provide us with some written comments on these bullet points in advance of the meeting. They will be used to inform background briefing for Members. If you are able to do so, please can you send us your comments by 22 June 2022? It would be helpful if your comments were no more than 2 sides of A4 paper.