



Welsh Government

NetZeroSkills@gov.wales

XX December 2023

Dear Colleague,

Consultation: Net zero sector skills in Wales

Thank you very much for the opportunity to take part in the above consultation. The consultation seeks views on the skills that will be needed by the net zero sectors workforce in Wales to secure a greener, fairer and better future for Wales. The consultation document refers to the need for a bilingual workforce in the net zero sectors and acknowledges the emphasis on Welsh-medium education and training in the [Cymraeg 2050](#) strategy.

However, we'd like to see further consideration regarding the wider potential of the net zero sector to contribute to the economic prosperity of areas with a high density of Welsh speakers, thereby contributing to maintaining and supporting the Welsh language as a community language. The development of the sector skills road maps needs to further consider the relationship between economic development and the viability of the Welsh language, and more specifically the potential of net zero economic developments to ensure the economic prosperity of those areas where the Welsh language is at its strongest.

Our response therefore focuses on the following issues:

- The relationship between the net zero strategy and Welsh Government policies on supporting the economy of Welsh speaking communities
- The relationship and potential that exists between certain net zero sectors and Welsh speaking communities. Sectors such as agriculture, land use and forestry

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and electricity and heat generation offer obvious economic opportunities for areas with high concentrations of Welsh speakers.

- The importance of planning local Welsh language education and training pathways in these specific sectors. By planning purposefully there is an opportunity to develop the skills of the population to offer high quality jobs, to encourage young people to stay in their areas, and to meet the economic needs of the future in these areas.
- The contribution of the net zero skills sector to the national strategy for increasing the use of Welsh in workplaces and in providing services

1. The net zero strategy, Cymraeg 2050 and strengthening Welsh-speaking communities

Supporting the socio-economic infrastructure of Welsh-speaking communities is one of the core objectives of the Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy. The Cymraeg 2050 strategy emphasises the importance of developing a prosperous, sustainable economy to maintain and strengthen those communities where there is a high density of Welsh speakers. The challenge is to ensure that people have good quality jobs, attractive careers and homes so that they can stay in those communities, or return to them. The net zero sector, as an economy that will be increasingly crucial in the future, is highly significant in this context.

As part of its strategy for supporting Welsh speaking communities, the Welsh Government has established a Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities, which will be responsible for considering ways of strengthening the position of Welsh as a community language. In its initial [position paper](#) published in June 2023, the Commission makes the link between the need to support the economic prosperity of Welsh-speaking communities, and the exciting opportunities that exist because of net zero economic developments. The Commission's position paper identifies the potential for the economy of the western areas of Wales to flourish because of 'green transformation economic opportunities', particularly as 'it possesses many relevant natural resources'.

There is a clear overlap here between some of the core objectives of the Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy, and the strategy that exists for delivering net zero

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commitments. The consultation does not adequately consider these linkages, nor does it explain the key role of the skills sector in Wales in this context. We recommend that you contact the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities to better understand the situation of these communities and to understand how the road maps can reflect the needs of skills within Welsh-speaking communities.

1. Skills needs of specific net zero sectors and the future of Welsh-speaking communities

Several of the net zero sectors discussed in the consultation are very relevant in the context of the relationship between the net zero strategy and the future of Welsh-speaking communities. In other words, many of the areas where there is a high density of Welsh speakers are also areas where there is potential for net zero economic development. There are therefore specific considerations in relation to skills needs in these areas.

2.1 Agriculture, land use and forestry

In the context of the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023, section 1.2 of the consultation asks what new and transition skills are needed to support new farming practices in Wales. According to the National Census figures 43% of agricultural workers speak Welsh, compared to 19% of the population as a whole. Agriculture is the employment sector with the highest proportion of Welsh speakers, and supporting it to thrive should be a priority to ensure that the Welsh language is viable in our rural communities. This principle is built into the fourth sustainable management objective of the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2021, which requires *“to conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them, and to maintain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use.”*

Working towards the achievement of net zero commitments will have a significant impact on the agricultural sector in Wales, and therefore of necessity on communities where the Welsh language is at its strongest. The Wales Centre for Public Policy’s report [Net zero skills: Insights and evidence from emissions sectors in Wales](#) (2020: 6) reports that ‘NFU

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Cymru describes farming in Wales as a 'stronghold of the Welsh language'. The language therefore needs to be treated carefully as the structure of the labour market changes. Buying farmland for carbon capture and storage, for example, changes land use and in turn compromises the linguistic balance of areas." The report recommends that the Government and other participants in the education and skills system consider the need for local provision of Welsh-medium courses and qualifications, to ensure that Welsh-speaking workers and language users are supported throughout the transition period. This assessment is true for the agricultural sector, as well as the land use, land change and forestry sectors.

There are therefore several specific considerations that the road maps should consider in the context of the agriculture, land use and forestry sector. The significance of changes in these sectors to the future of Welsh speaking communities needs to be recognised. The future of these significant communities will depend on supporting the sector to adapt and change, and providing training and skills through the medium of Welsh will be an essential part of this. The road maps need to consider how developing and upskilling the existing workforce will not only support a net zero agenda, but also the objectives of the Sustainable Farming Scheme, and the objectives of the Government's Welsh language strategy.

2.2 Electricity and heat generation sector

The consultation refers to regions of the UK that are appropriate for low carbon power generation, with a potential focus on areas of priority for tackling socio-economic inequalities. We believe that many of the rural and post-industrial communities with a high density of Welsh speakers are relevant in this context. The Cymraeg 2050 strategy also refers to some of these areas as places where there are pockets of rural poverty and deprivation, and average wages which are among the lowest in the United Kingdom. It is clear to us therefore that further consideration needs to be given to the potential for developments in the electricity and heat generation sector in those areas with a high density of Welsh speakers; which have relevant natural resources, and which would also benefit significantly from such socio-economic investment.

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The consultation also refers to maximising local ownership, retaining economic and social benefits in Wales. We agree that models of local ownership of energy generation are an effective way of creating good jobs in Welsh-speaking areas. They also have the potential to contribute to the economy of the local area. We are aware of several community initiatives in the electricity and heat generation sector that operate through the medium of Welsh and contribute to the local economy. In our conversations with Community Energy Wales for example, the Ynni Ogwen Partnership and Ynni Sir Gar appear to be a good practice models of how to make the most of local ownership and proactively support the Welsh language.

Reference is made in the consultation to a commitment to work with Natural Resources Wales to undertake an end-to-end review of the marine licensing processes. Many coastal areas of West Wales include communities with the highest density of Welsh speakers, and that population could take advantage of developments in this sector. We are aware that Menter Môn, which also operates in Welsh and for the benefit of the Welsh language and the communities of Anglesey, has developed a tidal energy project, Morlais. The pathways should actively learn from initiatives such as Ynni Ogwen, Ynni Sir Gar and Menter Môn to understand what skills were essential to their success, and what skills they anticipate they will need in the future. Community Energy Wales has launched a joint ownership working group, bringing together commercial developers and community energy groups to share information, tackle barriers, and develop best practice. Engagement with that working group could be an effective way of learning about skills needs at a local level, and to think about how the pathways could support other Welsh speaking communities to repeat the achievements of community energy groups already in existence and innovating.

3. Local Welsh language education and training pathways

As already noted, to maximise the potential that exists to support the economic prosperity of Welsh-speaking communities through net zero developments, it is essential that suitable education and training pathways are available locally, and through the medium of Welsh. For example, if an area has the potential for wind energy development, then there is a

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need to ensure that there are training pathways for local people to be able to take advantage of this, through the medium of Welsh. In addition, courses specific to industries in an area should be as close to that area as possible, to facilitate people to stay and live in their communities.

Section 1 of the consultation asks whether there is provision for developing the necessary skills in Wales. Although we don't have a full picture of the gaps that exist in provision in Wales, we know that a substantial number of students from Wales go to study at universities in England. There are probably a number of reasons for this, and it is possible that a lack of adequate provision is part of this. The rates of young people leaving Wales to go to university are significantly higher than in the other nations of Britain. There is no evidence available of the numbers of students returning to Wales after graduation, but it is likely that a number of these students do not return to Wales after they graduate. We see this as a problem in meeting the needs of Wales, and it undermines the intention of this consultation to plan for the needs of Wales. The pathways should consider how they could play a part in dealing with this phenomenon that is very destructive, not only for the Welsh language, but for the future prosperity of Wales.

We were pleased to read in the consultation papers that increasing the number of people who can teach through the medium of Welsh is a priority, and that you see the link between that and the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. It's important to recognise that the Cymraeg 2050 strategy and the [Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan](#) are aimed at addressing several of the above issues. We suggest that you consider this when developing the road maps, and that the maps show exactly how learners' linguistic needs will be met when developing courses, qualifications, learning materials and engagement campaigns.

We have very little knowledge of Welsh language skills needs in different sectors. As net zero is going to be increasingly important, in order to plan and act strategically reliable data needs to be collected to baseline the national and local picture, and then set targets for improvement. In that respect, we encourage you to collect data on the Welsh language

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skills that exist within the various net zero sectors, as well as how many organisations operate through the medium of Welsh. This may be a discussion to be had in conjunction with the Regional Skills Partnerships.

Improving the data base could have positive effects beyond educational planning. For example, there are requirements to assess the impact on the Welsh language when considering planning applications for major developments, but town and country planners often report that they don't have an evidence base to be able to carry out full and detailed assessments. We think it should be possible to create assessments of the skills available in communities, as well as the ability of communities to develop skills, and that this is part of the methodology of assessing the likely impact of developments on the Welsh language. Major developments that create many jobs within areas where there is a high density of Welsh speakers should be able to demonstrate the likelihood of local people being able to take advantage of those jobs. There is an opportunity through the road maps to plan towards being able to do so in the future.

4. Increasing the use of the Welsh language in workplaces and in providing services

Cymraeg 2050 refers to the workplace as a key area for increasing the use of Welsh. It explains that the workplace is central to our daily lives and important in terms of the linguistic development of individuals, as it is an opportunity for speakers at all levels to use and practice the language. Ensuring that education and training for net zero sector skills is available through the medium of Welsh is essential in this overall context.

The above points are particularly true in the context of sectors dealing with the public, and providing services to the public. Some organisations may also be under Welsh language standards which means that they have a duty to provide services through the medium of Welsh. There will therefore be an increasing demand for workforces that can provide service through the medium of Welsh. Over 120 public organisations operate under Welsh language standards, including county councils, national parks, higher education colleges, universities, the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales, and over time more organisations will be covered by the standards. In the context of Cymraeg 2050's target to increase the number of speakers to one million, we anticipate that demand for a Welsh

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language workforce and services will also increase within net zero sectors beyond the standards regime. The road maps should reflect the impact of this increasing demand for Welsh language skills within existing and future workforces.

We hope you find the above comments useful in your consultation, and I am happy for my officials to meet with you to discuss further. Thank you once again for the opportunity to contribute. It's clear that the net zero sector is going to become increasingly important in Wales, and there is a need to ensure that suitable training pathways through the medium of Welsh are available across Wales. There is a real opportunity here for the road maps to show exactly how we will ensure that this happens.

Yours truly,

Efa Gruffudd Jones

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