



Welsh Affairs Committee

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28 March 2025

Dear Committee Members,

Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales Inquiry

In 2019, we published a survey of the rights and experiences of Welsh-speaking prisoners, namely [*The Welsh Language in Prisons*](#). The survey made 17 recommendations to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) which were all accepted as requiring implementation. The recommendations for *The Welsh Language in Prisons* were in line with the recommendations of the Welsh Affairs Committee's inquiry published a few months later, namely that the HMPPS needed:

- to make fundamental changes to the way in which it places prisoners
- to collect data on prisoners' linguistic needs
- to make it clear to prisoners that they can communicate with each other and with external contacts through the medium of Welsh
- to improve access to Welsh services in prisons and develop the Welsh language skills of its staff.

HMPPS produced [*a new Welsh language scheme*](#) which committed to addressing those recommendations and included plans for their implementation, including:

- to revise the data collected on the language needs of prisoners to identify the preferred language in different situations, and to identify the ability to speak Welsh as well as the preferred language

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- to strengthen arrangements to ensure that data on the Welsh language is routinely collected for all prisoners, and that all prisons can access correct data to plan their services
- to strengthen arrangements to monitor the availability and quality of the Welsh language services offered in prisons, and to help prisons to offer those services
- to ensure a continuous process to collect current data on the language skills of prison staff, and to use these data to plan services for Welsh speakers, including raising prisoners' awareness of the opportunities available to use Welsh with staff
- to take steps, particularly when recruiting new members of staff, to ensure that there are a sufficient number of staff members available to offer consistent and reliable services to Welsh-speaking prisoners
- to consider Welsh language provision from the outset when planning to open any new prisons in Wales, including recruiting staff with Welsh language skills
- to review the training offered to prison staff to address the shortcomings highlighted in *The Welsh Language in Prisons*, particularly regarding the recording of data on Welsh speakers and interfering with the freedom to speak Welsh, and to investigate the possibility of increasing capacity by developing the language skills of its current staff
- to ensure that the needs of Welsh-speaking women are considered fully as part of any plans to develop the provision for female offenders under the UK Government strategy.

We approved the scheme in 2020 for the period 2020-23. We are currently working with HMPPS to develop a new Welsh language scheme. In the meantime, the 2020-23 plan is still in operation, and HMPPS has a duty to report on the progress of the language scheme on an annual basis. As part of that arrangement my officers correspond and meet with the organisation to scrutinise the report, and that is our main source in responding to this consultation.

To what extent does UK Government policy and associated missions, as they relate to offender management, take Wales' public service delivery landscape into account?

In 2021 the Ministry of Justice published the [Prison Strategy White Paper](#). The white paper set out the strategic direction of the prison service for the decade to come. It's common for

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strategies that set direction for public services in Wales to consider its effects on the Welsh Government's other strategies, including the [*Cymraeg 2050*](#) strategy. The white paper didn't consider how it would affect or contribute to *Cymraeg 2050*. We were also disappointed to see that there wasn't a single reference to the Welsh language, or HMPPS's Welsh language scheme, in the white paper.

Among the main aims of the white paper were:

- transforming the workforce by recruiting 5,000 new prison officers and increasing the skills of the current workforce
- addressing reoffending with education, skills development, and a new job matching service
- ensuring transparent prison performance data with new league tables
- announcing the opening of a pilot residential centre for women in Swansea as a community alternative to short prison sentences.

These goals are in line with several recommendations made in *The Welsh Language in Prisons*, and therefore also with the priorities of HMPPS's Welsh language scheme. There are clear links between the aspirations of HMPPS's Welsh language scheme and the main aims of the white paper, specifically in the context of data, the workforce and education and skills services. This was an opportunity to ensure that the Welsh language and the priorities of the Welsh language scheme are mainstreamed and considered an integral part of HMPPS's plans regarding its workforce planning and its development of new data collecting and reporting systems. That would have facilitated and supported the implementation of HMPPS's Welsh language scheme. It would be useful for the committee to look at why the Welsh language was not considered in the white paper, and the extent to which some of the commitments of HMPPS's Welsh language scheme could be incorporated into the strategy moving forward.

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How effective are the intergovernmental relations between the UK and Welsh Governments - and their associated agencies - when it comes to supporting Welsh offenders?

The Welsh Language in Prisons reported that the fact that the UK Government is responsible for the prison system whilst several matters affecting the well-being of prisoners have been devolved to Wales has resulted in a complex situation and caused some difficulties. The Prisons Strategy White Paper calls for more coordinated action on a whole system basis to increase the probability of successful rehabilitation. As part of this, enabling prisoners to speak their own language shows respect towards their identity and enables them to express themselves better. In an ideal world, the linguistic needs of prisoners in the system would only need to be identified once, and prisoners would be able to progress through the rehabilitation process with their linguistic needs satisfied. Even though the Welsh and UK governments have different responsibilities for different components of the system, they should work together better to share information on the linguistic needs of individuals.

How effective are offender management services - both in custody and the community - in reducing reoffending and keeping offenders and the public safe, and are Welsh perspectives sufficiently accounted for during the commissioning of such services?

The language needs of Welsh-speaking offenders need to be met to give them the best chance of effective rehabilitation. Enabling prisoners to express themselves in their own language is particularly important considering that prisoners have greater needs than the general population in terms of learning difficulties, and in terms of physical and mental health. One of the main messages of *The Welsh Language in Prisons* was that HMPPS needed to improve its internal arrangements to increase its ability to provide quality Welsh language services to offenders in custody and the community.

The Welsh Language in Prisons and the subsequent Welsh language scheme focused on making changes to the way HMPPS operates to increase prisoners' access to the rights and Welsh services that they should already have. In their annual reports and in meetings with my officers, HMPPS reports that they've implemented many of the changes

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recommended in *The Welsh Language in Prisons*. Below is a summary of the most significant changes:

- Creating two posts responsible for implementing the language scheme, with one role focusing on prisons and the other on the probation service
- Developing and providing training for all staff in Wales on Welsh language matters and awareness of the language scheme; and plans are also underway to provide training for staff across the whole estate in England
- The form filled by prisoners on arrival at the prison now contains questions for recording language choice and linguistic ability; and staff training emphasises the value of these data
- The database used to collect prisoner data, PNOMIS, can now hold information on prisoners' language choice and ability. This change should enable HMPPS to identify and track Welsh-speaking prisoners and enable them to tailor services to meet the needs of those prisoners where possible. An example of good practice at HM Prison Parc was shared, which goes beyond the requirements of the language scheme, where staff also record prisoners' dialects in order to be able to assess their linguistic needs in more detail and tailor services if possible
- The human resources system used by the Ministry of Justice organisations has been updated to allow for the collection of staff language skills. The project to change the system was jointly funded by HMPPS and HM Courts and Tribunals Service. This should enable HMPPS to plan the workforce better, identifying where the gaps are in terms of Welsh language skills and acting on that information. Despite this development, HMPPS hasn't managed to publish staff language skills data in its latest monitoring report.
- HMPPS has made internal governance changes, creating a delivery panel to implement the scheme in an attempt to standardise its approaches across the organisation.

It is therefore apparent that some progress has been made towards implementing some of the recommendations of *The Welsh Language in Prisons*. However, monitoring a Welsh language scheme doesn't necessarily give a complete picture, and it appears that there's a long way to go to fully implement the recommendations of *The Welsh Language in Prisons* and the Committee's investigation. For example, we haven't received information on how HMPPS will consider the linguistic needs of prisoners when placing prisoners. In

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addition, information about Welsh language provisions within individual prisons is fragmented, and HMPPS has no systematic method for collecting this information to have an overview of the situation across the estate.

In addition, HMPPS hasn't reported any progress in its recruitment arrangements to increase the number of staff who are able to speak Welsh beyond making Welsh language skills as desirable for all roles based in Wales. If real change is to be made, HMPPS needs to identify where the Welsh language skills are needed to provide better services, then categorise those roles as ones where Welsh language skills are essential and then run a recruitment campaign targeting Welsh speakers.

How does the lack of a women's prison in Wales impact upon the experiences and rehabilitation of Welsh women offenders?

The evidence available to us continues to suggest that the arrangements that HMPPS have in place to implement their language scheme are better within the borders of Wales. An example of this is given in HMPPS's latest annual report on the Welsh language scheme (December 2023), where it was reported that Welsh language societies have been established in 2 out of the 12 women's prisons based in England. In comparison, it was reported that all 5 men's prisons located in Wales have succeeded in establishing a Welsh language society. Similarly, the report expresses confidence in the data being collected on the language skills of prisoners within Wales, while expressing less certainty over the data collected in women's prisons in particular. Without core data that enables HMPPS to identify the location of Welsh-speaking prisoners, it's even harder to plan, target and promote services that are linguistically tailored to them.

The Welsh Language in Prisons recommended that HMPPS should ensure that the needs of Welsh speaking women are fully considered as part of any plans to develop the provision for female offenders under the British Government's strategy. In 2023 a pilot residential centre for women was opened in Swansea, but there was no evidence in the documentation for the development, nor in the latest monitoring report on the Welsh language scheme, that HMPPS had considered the needs of Welsh speaking women as part of the development of this scheme. However, we welcome the development, as it increases the capacity of HMPPS to keep female offenders in Wales and therefore increases the likelihood of offering Welsh-medium services to those women.

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To what extent is there parity between the services available to prisoners in England and those available to prisoners in Wales, including access to Welsh language services?

As expressed above in our answer to the question about women's prisons, there's a fundamental difference between Welsh services for prisoners based in prisons in Wales, and those based in prisons outside of Wales. To effectively provide services through the medium of Welsh, it's essential for an organisation to have a workforce that has the linguistic skills to provide them. Naturally, this is much easier to achieve in prisons located in areas where there's a higher density of Welsh speakers in the population. *The Welsh Language in Prisons* confirmed that prisoners based in Welsh prisons were much more likely to receive services through the medium of Welsh than prisoners based in England. That's still the case today, and indeed, it's reflected in HMPPS's Welsh language scheme. There are significantly more commitments to provide Welsh-medium services in Wales in the scheme, while the commitments for prisoners based in English prisons focus on very basic rights such as prisoners' rights to speak Welsh with each other and with their families and friends over the phone or during visits.

In addition to the rights that prisoners based in Wales have through HMPPS's Welsh language scheme, they also have rights to care and health services, which are provided by the local authority and the health board where the prison is located. That means that rights derived from Welsh language standards apply to those prisoners. *The Welsh Language in Prisons* reported that evidence from organisations providing health and care services within prisons in Wales suggested that some processes were in place to consider the language needs of users, but little information was received regarding the day-to-day operation of Welsh language services.

An important part of *The Welsh Language in Prisons* was the data collected as part of interviews with prisoners and former prisoners, as this gave us a better understanding of the experiences of Welsh speakers in prison. We are aware of an ongoing research project by Dr Robert Jones of the Wales Governance Centre which looks at the experiences of Welsh-speaking prisoners in England and Wales. The study is part of a wider project looking at the rights of prisoners in the UK, and they're hoping to conduct interviews with prisoners and their families. We hope that HMPPS will work closely with Dr

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Jones to enhance the content. We suggest that you contact Dr Jones for more information on the project and its findings so far.

In our [2024 assurance report](#) we reported that good work and progress in some organisations implementing Welsh language schemes, however it was clear from our findings that the enforceable regime of the Welsh language standards is far more effective and leads to improved services and a genuine increase in opportunities to use Welsh. If we are to see the same pattern of progress as evidenced with the introduction of the standards, it is essential that these organisations are also brought under the standards regime. We have stated that one of our priorities in terms of bringing more bodies under Welsh language standards is that Welsh language standards regulations should be introduced on UK Government departments and persons practising on behalf of the Crown, such as HMPPS.

Conclusions

- When *The Welsh Language in Prisons* was announced, we recognised that HMPPS needed time to make fundamental changes to the organisation's processes and culture. Over the five years since the Welsh language scheme was published, HMPPS has worked with my officers and explained how they are addressing the changes that needed to be made, and it appears that some changes have been made to the way they operate.
- HMPPS now has a better data collection system about the linguistic ability of prisoners and their staff, and therefore they should now be shifting their focus more towards using that data to plan the workforce and Welsh language provisions around the linguistic needs of prisoners.
- There's a need to develop and improve database for mapping what provisions are available in Welsh per prison and linking that to the data on the linguistic ability of prisoners and staff to understand where the gaps are, and which prisons can best meet the needs of Welsh speaking prisoners. This information should then be a consideration in the process of locating prisoners.
- We expect that the next Welsh language scheme will address these issues in more detail to move closer to implementing the recommendations of *The Welsh Language in Prisons* and the investigation of the Committee in full.

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- The Prison Strategy White Paper sets out an ambitious vision to reform the prison system, and there is a need to ensure that improving prison Welsh language services is an integral part of this process. That would facilitate the delivery of the commitments of the current HMPPS Welsh language scheme, as well as enable them to build on the existing commitments in the next scheme. I would like the Committee to try and ensure that that happens through this inquiry, and make recommendations if necessary.

Yours faithfully,

Efa Gruffudd Jones

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