



Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

# Promoting the Welsh Language within the BAME community

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Newport City Council has worked in partnership with key stakeholders to develop and deliver a project aimed at improving the BAME communities' engagement with Welsh language culture and education.

## BACKGROUND

The impact of the Welsh language standards, and the rights they give to citizens in Wales to use Welsh with public organisations, prompted discussions between relevant stakeholders in Newport about the potential impact of standards, both culturally and on the jobs market in Wales. What emerged from these discussions, as well as the opportunity to develop a new strategy in the form of the 5 Year Welsh Language Strategy, was a consensus that organisations involved in the promotion of the Welsh language needed to be more proactive in ensuring that the Welsh language was offered to all communities in the city. Not only facilitating full participation of all communities in Welsh civic life, but also improving life chances for individuals in the future.

A review of Newport City Council's PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census) data revealed that children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds were three times less likely to attend Welsh medium education than English education. This was echoed the Council's consultation. Responses to the authority's 5 year Welsh Language Strategy highlighted an apparent under engagement between the city's BAME community and the Welsh language.

Stakeholders within the field of Welsh language promotion identified that they not only had a lower proportion of engagement from BAME communities, but were also struggling to gain traction in areas of the city with the highest proportions of BAME communities i.e. Pillgwenlli and Maendy.

The Council was concerned that individuals and communities were missing out on opportunities to benefit from having Welsh language skills, potentially leading to a lack of cohesion and disadvantage for minority groups in Newport.

## ISSUED THAT HAD TO BE ADDRESSED

The major barriers identified were:

1. From the perspective of Welsh Language practitioners there was a gap in the knowledge of Welsh Language organisations in terms of how to engage with BAME groups. This included both general cultural awareness and a more technical understanding of delivering equitable outcomes across different communities, i.e. adopting different engagement strategies emphasising different messages to achieve comparable outcomes (a practice that is more common in the field of public health promotion and education).
2. From the perspective of BAME community members and traditional equalities organisations there was a limited understanding of the rights that exist around using Welsh and how Welsh language classes or schooling could be accessed. In addition to this, there was also an apparent lack of awareness around the potential benefits of learning Welsh, both culturally and economically. This possibly reflected a lack of understanding about contemporary developments in the Welsh language, particularly the Welsh Language Measure.

## PUTTING THE PRACTICE TO WORK

The authority was able to use its central and statutory position to both identify the initial need for change, but also use its links with different groups and organisations to facilitate collective working. For this project the Council collaborated with SEWREC, the local Equality Council, Menter Iaith Casnewydd and Cymraeg i Oedolion.

The first step was to organise an event to launch the project which brought together all relevant stakeholders together. The purpose of the event was to facilitate a discussion between those working within Welsh language promotion and those working with the BAME communities on how the organisations could work together better.

A grant application was submitted and approved which resulted in Dysgu Cymraeg Gwent financing the project to deliver 3 sessions for up to 20 adults as well as 3 family orientated sessions aimed at promoting all aspects of the Welsh language.

The family sessions created an environment which provided a taste of Welsh medium childcare and social activities facilitated through organised games and children's entertainment. These sessions in particular aimed to normalise the Welsh language for all attendees by normalising Welsh in situations that used work and play. For the parents and guardians they also provided an opportunity to learn more about Welsh medium education and how to access it. The adult sessions were more structured and covered things like basic Welsh words and phrases as well as a historical and cultural introduction to the Welsh language.

## OUTCOME AND IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The project's outcomes were:

1. A greater awareness of the need to improve engagement strategies among organisations that promote the use of Welsh language (both statutory and voluntary sector partners).
2. An agreed framework for future cooperation between organisations was established. This will not only facilitate an ongoing transfer of knowledge between partners, but could act as a consortium for future funding applications in this field.

The project and its outcomes have established a framework of partnership between organisations that are experts in their respective areas, SEWREC, the local Equality Council which has over twenty years of experience working with minority communities across Newport, Menter Iaith Casnewydd and Cymraeg i Oedolion. This partnership is open to other active stakeholders which work in the field of Welsh language promotion.

Other outcomes of the project included:

- The Council gained experience of partners working with people outside their usual stakeholder group and thus gained the local knowledge and confidence to do so again
- Confirmation that some BAME people weren't engaged with the Welsh language but were interested and found it relevant if engaged appropriately
- The Council gained intelligence on people's perception of English and Welsh Language skills in Newport. People have concerns about needing good English language skills and don't realise that children also develop good English skills through Welsh medium education.

## THE FUTURE

The promotion of the Welsh language across all communities in Wales is not something that one organisation alone can deliver. In the future it is hoped that the organisations who participated in this project will continue to work together on consortia projects about widening the accessibility of the Welsh language.

Within the context of the wider goal of a million Welsh speakers by 2050, Newport and similar areas across South East Wales have the largest capacity for growth. Hard work is needed to ensure that that growth is inclusive and reflective of the diverse communities as a whole.

## **TRANSFERABLE FACTORS**

The success of the project relied heavily on Welsh language practitioners and other organisations working with BAME communities working closely together. Other organisations could follow the same two-part model of engagement in which Welsh language practitioners work more closely with other organisations and stakeholders to gain the confidence to reach out to and work with people from BAME backgrounds and people.

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## **THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER'S VIEW**

The Welsh Government's vision of creating a million Welsh speakers is challenging and ambitious, but offers an excellent opportunity for organisations, associations and communities across Wales to work together to achieve the goal. I welcome Newport City Council and its key partners' initiative and proactive approach to address the apparent under engagement of the BAME communities with the Welsh language. The Welsh language belongs to all citizens in Wales, and we are increasingly seeing the language thriving within a multilingual and multi-faith world.