



Committee on Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs

SeneddEconomi@senedd.cymru

07 March 2024

Dear Colleague

Consultation: inquiry into the green economy

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in the above consultation. We believe the net zero sector has real potential to contribute to the economic prosperity of areas with a high density of Welsh speakers, thereby contributing to maintaining and supporting Welsh as a community language and supporting the Government's language strategy, [Cymraeg 2050](#). Our response focuses on what we consider should be the Government's priorities to ensure this happens.

Our response focuses on the following issues:

- The relationship between the net zero strategy and Welsh Government policies about 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, and electricity and heat generation offer obvious economic opportunities for areas with a high density of Welsh speakers.
- The importance of education planning and local Welsh language training pathways in these specific sectors. From purposeful planning there is an opportunity to develop the skills of the population to offer good quality jobs, to encourage young people to stay in their areas, and to meet future economic needs in these areas.

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- The contribution of the net zero skills sector to the national strategy for increasing the use of Welsh in workplaces and in service delivery.
- Ways to empower communities to take advantage of the economic opportunities of the green economy.

The green economy, Cymraeg 2050, and strengthening Welsh communities

Supporting the socio-economic infrastructure of Welsh-speaking communities is a core objective of the Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy. The [Cymraeg 2050](#) strategy emphasises the importance of developing a prosperous, sustainable economy to sustain and strengthen those communities with 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, or return to, those communities. The green economy sectors, as an increasingly key economy in the future, are hugely significant in this context.

As part of its strategy for supporting Welsh-speaking communities, the Welsh Government has established a Commission on Welsh-language Communities, which will be responsible for considering ways to strengthen the position of Welsh as a community language. In its [initial position](#) paper published in June 2023, the Commission makes the connection between the need to support the economic prosperity of Welsh-speaking communities, and the exciting opportunities that exist from net zero economic developments. The Commission's position paper sees potential for the economy of the western areas of Wales to recover from the *'economic opportunities of a green transformation'*, 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 achieving net zero commitments. Considering these links and clarifying the key role of the skills sector in Wales in this context should be a priority for the Government. We are also keen to see skills needs within Welsh-speaking communities reflected within the road maps for skills in

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the net zero sector that the Government are preparing in attendance and through the Sustainable Farming Scheme. The Government should invest in green economy developments in rural and post-industrial areas with a high density of Welsh speakers, in the interests of the green economy and Welsh language agenda. The evidence base needs to be improved for better planning and to help local people access the jobs that can result from the transformation of the green economy. Focusing on integrating related policy agendas (for example, the Welsh language, the green economy, and agriculture) is one way of maximising investment and maximising benefits in the context of significant budgetary constraints.

Skills needs of green economy sectors and the future of Welsh-speaking communities

Various net zero sectors are very relevant in the context of the future of Welsh-speaking communities. In other words, many of the areas with a high density of Welsh speakers are also areas where there is potential for net zero economic development. This is therefore one area that the Government should be prioritising to maximise the economic and linguistic/community opportunities that exist throughout green economy sectors. There are also specific considerations in terms of skills needs in these areas, which therefore require the Government to work in partnership with a number of organisations, for example, education providers, the Tertiary Education Commission and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

Agriculture, land use and forestry

The National Census showed that 43% of agricultural workers (including fishing and forestry) spoke Welsh, compared to 17.8% of the general population. 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 contained in the fourth objective of sustainable land management of the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023, which requires the need “to conserve

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and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and to promote public access and engagement with them and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use.”

Working towards achieving net zero commitments will have a significant influence on the agriculture sector in Wales, and therefore by default on communities where the Welsh language is strongest. The Wales Centre for Public Policy report [Net zero skills: Insights and evidence from emissions sectors in Wales](#) (2020:6) reports that “*NFU Cymru describes Welsh farming as a ‘stronghold for the Welsh language’. The protection of the language therefore requires careful treatment as the structure of the labour market changes. The purchase of farmland for carbon sequestration, for example, changes the use of the land and in turn risks altering the language 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 users are supported throughout the transition period. This assessment is true for the agriculture sector, as well as the land use, land change and forestry sectors.

There are therefore a number of specific considerations that the Government 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 the provision of training and skills through the medium of Welsh will be a vital part of this. The Government 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.

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Electricity and heat generation sector

The Government's recent consultation on skills in the net zero sector pointed to regions of the UK appropriate for low carbon power generation, with a potential focus on areas that are priorities for tackling socio-economic inequalities. We think 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 having pockets of rural deprivation and poverty, and average wages are among the lowest in the United Kingdom. It is therefore clear to us that further consideration needs to be given to the potential of developments in the electricity and heat generation sector in those areas that have a high density of Welsh speakers, have relevant natural resources, and would also benefit significantly from such socio-economic investment.

Local Welsh language education and training pathways

As has already been set out, to harness the potential that exists to support the economic prosperity of Welsh-speaking communities through net zero development, 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 needs to be training pathways for local people to access this, through the medium of Welsh. In addition, training courses for specific industries should be provided as close as possible to that area, to facilitate people to stay and live in their communities.

Although we do not have a full picture of the gaps that exist in provision in Wales, we do know that a significant number of students from Wales are going to study in English universities. There are probably several reasons for this, and a lack of adequate provision may be part of the reason. The rates of young people leaving Wales to go to university are significantly higher than the other countries in Britain. There is no evidence available on the numbers of students returning to Wales after graduation, but it is likely that many of these students are not returning. We see this as a problem in meeting the needs of Wales, and it undermines the Government's intention of planning for the needs of Wales. The

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Government should consider how it could play a part in the effort to deal with this phenomenon, which is deeply destructive, not only for the Welsh language, but for Wales' future prosperity. This will require close collaboration with partners within the education and training sector.

We have very little information about the skills needs of Welsh in different sectors. As the green economy is to be increasingly important, and to enable strategic planning and action, it is necessary to collect reliable data to set a baseline of the national and local picture, and then set targets for improvement. In that regard, the Welsh Government needs to work with the Regional Skills Partnerships, and other relevant stakeholders including the Welsh Language Commissioner, to develop a more robust evidence base about the Welsh skills that exist within the various net zero sectors, as well as how many organisations operate through the medium of Welsh.

Improving the data base could also be helpful in assessing the impact of planning applications for major developments. Town and country planners often report that they lack an evidence base to be able to make full and deep 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 is part of the methodology of assessing the likely impact of developments on the Welsh language. Major developments that create a lot of jobs within areas with a high density of Welsh speakers should be able to show how likely local people are to be able to access those jobs. There is an opportunity, through the road maps for skills in the net zero sector that the Government are currently preparing, to plan towards being able to do so in the future.

Increasing the use of Welsh in workplaces and in the provision of services

Cymraeg 2050 mentions the workplace as a key space for increasing the use of Welsh. It explains that the workplace is central to our daily lives and important in the linguistic development of individuals, as it is an opportunity for speakers at all levels to use and

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practice the language. Making education and training for net zero sector skills available through the medium of Welsh is essential in this overall context. This is one clear challenge for the Welsh Government and other key partners.

The above points are particularly true in the context of sectors relating to the public and providing services to the public. Some organisations may also be under Welsh language standards which means they have a duty to provide services through the medium of Welsh. There will therefore be a growing demand for workforces that can serve through the medium of Welsh. More than 120 public institutions operate the Welsh language standards, including county councils, national parks, higher education colleges, universities, the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales, and over time more institutions will fall under the standards. In the context of the Cymraeg 2050 target to increase the number of speakers to one million, we anticipate that demand for Welsh language services and workforce will increase within net zero sectors that are also beyond the standards regime. The net zero sector road maps should reflect the impact of this increased demand for Welsh language skills within current and future workforces.

Empowering communities to take advantage of the green economy's economic opportunities

The Government's recent consultation on net zero sector skills pointed to maximising local ownership, while retaining economic and social benefits in Wales. We agree that models of local ownership over energy production 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, Ynni Ogwen and Ynni Sir Gâr emerged as models of a good practice example of how to maximise local ownership and proactively support the Welsh language.

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Many coastal areas of West Wales contain communities with the highest density of Welsh speakers, and that population could benefit from developments in the marine energy sector. We are aware that Menter Môn, which also operates in Welsh and for the benefit of the Welsh language and Anglesey communities, has developed a tidal stream energy project, Morlais. The Government should actively learn from initiatives such as Ynni Ogwen, Ynni Sir Gâr 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 working group on shared ownership, bringing together commercial developers and community energy groups to share information, address barriers, and develop best practice. Engaging with that working group could be an effective way to learn about skills needs at a local level, and to think about how the Government could support other Welsh-speaking communities to recount the successes of existing community energy groups and innovations.

We hope you find the above comments useful in your consultation, and I'm happy for my officers to meet with you for further discussion.

Yours faithfully,

Efa Gruffudd Jones

Welsh Language Commissioner

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