



Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

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20 February 2026

Dear Colleague

### **Invitation to provide written evidence: ARFOR**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide evidence as the Committee scrutinises the work of Welsh Government ministers on implementing the ARFOR programme. Our response provides a concise overview of our key impressions of the scheme's successes to date, based on our engagement with the programme's Llwyddo'n Lleol, Cymunedau Mentrus and Cronfa Her workstreams.

### **Llwyddo'n Lleol**

It should be noted that one of my officers has sat as a non-executive member of the steering group for the Llwyddo'n Lleol element of the programme. Non-executive members had no influence over decisions regarding the allocation of grant funding.

The Llwyddo'n Lleol project is trying to change long-term behaviour, but with a short-term funding stream. We believe the project has succeeded in creating content and activities that targeted young people from ARFOR in an attempt to reverse the common notion that they need to leave their home areas in order to be successful. The message is a strong one, and the brand has been established, so we believe the project could continue in the future if funding were available. We believe that long-term funding for a project of this kind would increase the likelihood of achieving the project's main objectives, and we hope that the next Welsh Government will commit to doing so.

The project steering group was very inclusive, with representation from a large number of public bodies in Wales operating nationally and in the four ARFOR counties. We

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understand that the intention in involving so many organisations was to spread the project's message and influence, but it's possible that a smaller group would have been more effective in providing strategic direction to this element of the ARFOR programme.

One of the project's aims was to attract young people, who had moved away from the ARFOR area, back to the area. Of course, we support the principle and the message here, but we believe that changing the message to encourage any Welsh speakers to move to ARFOR areas would be more inclusive, and possibly more successful in the long run.

### **Cymunedau Mentrus and Cronfa Her**

As part of the agreement to receive funding through these elements of the ARFOR programme, it was agreed that companies would need to accept the [Cynnig Cymraeg](#), that is, recognition by the Commissioner for organisations that highlight the services they can offer as a result of developing a Welsh language development plan. We were pleased to have the opportunity to collaborate with the ARFOR programme and to expand the reach of the Cynnig Cymraeg. This alignment between Cymunedau Mentrus, the Cronfa Her and the Cynnig Cymraeg led 35 additional organisations to offer more Welsh-language services. The table below summarises the number of people who have received the Welsh Offer by scheme.

Scheme	Number of organisations that received funding	Number who have received a Welsh Language Development Scheme template	Number who have completed and received the Cynnig Cymraeg	% who have received the Cynnig Cymraeg
Cymunedau Mentrus	65	65	18	28%
Cronfa Her	24	24	17	71%

There were inconsistencies across the counties in their methods of referring and monitoring organisations, with some counties starting the work months after others.

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Although not everyone ultimately completed the Cynnig Cymraeg, it is positive that every organisation has begun the process of creating a Welsh Language Development Plan. This has contributed to ensuring that investment from the Cymundeuau Mentrus grants and the Cronfa Her leads to increased opportunities for people to use Welsh when working and when receiving services from various businesses.

[A review of ARFOR 2](#) was published earlier this year, and the review concludes that the programme is succeeding in achieving some of its main objectives, but that there is also a need to consider targeting specific businesses and sectors in a more strategic way. This also aligns with our own impressions. Although there were many examples where the grant funding was spent on projects that are likely to have had a positive impact on the use of the Welsh language, there were other examples where the likely impact of the investment on the economic opportunities of Welsh speakers and on the wider use of the Welsh language was less obvious. We believe that the programme would have benefited from a longer strategic planning period to understand how the grant funding could have the most positive impact on creating economic opportunities for young people in the four counties, thereby expanding opportunities to use the Welsh language.

Decisions on the allocation of grants were made at local authority level. We believe that this decision, on the one hand, ensures that decisions are made at a more local level and therefore closer to the communities the funding was intended to support. But on the other hand, we believe that that decision has created inconsistency in the types of organisations and proposals that were successful across the ARFOR area. If a similar programme was run in the future, we believe it would be beneficial for local authorities to be provided with a strategic direction and clear guidance on how to make more consistent and strategic decisions when allocating the grants. We would therefore be keen for more expertise to be developed in the future in order to invest in larger-scale projects that have been planned more carefully and strategically, to have the greatest possible impact on the economy and viability of the Welsh language in the ARFOR areas. It should be noted that the limited timetable and budget of the ARFOR 2 programme did not facilitate this kind of careful, long-term strategic planning.

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## **Linking ARFOR activities with mainstream economic development programmes**

Despite the importance of the ARFOR programme, it must also be recognised that this investment is very small considering the wider economic development budget of the Welsh Government. For example, the City and Growth Deals provide investment worth billions of pounds and offer a strategic direction for economic developments across the whole of Wales over a period of 15 years. It is revealing that [a research report](#) by Aberystwyth University found that the Welsh language received very marginal consideration when developing growth deals in the north, the mid-Wales and the south-west regions. According to the report, the long-term impact of the City and Growth Deals will be very significant, given the high levels of public and private investment involved, but it appears they do not give serious consideration to the ARFOR programme, nor to the Welsh language.

Our understanding is that the link between ARFOR officers and officers responsible for the City and Growth Deals has been very weak, if not absent in some areas. Given that one of ARFOR's main ambitions was to better understand the link between the Welsh language and the economy and to pilot and mainstream successful interventions, this is disappointing. In our discussions with ARFOR officials, they report that there has been an effort to coordinate with the City and Growth Deals, but that the response has been weak.

The Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities recommends that the Welsh Government should develop an economic development strategy that specifically addresses the needs of areas of higher density linguistic significance. According to the Commission, that strategy should promote economic development approaches that focus on the basic needs of those communities. We agree with the Commission's assessment and are supportive of the call for a strategy that puts a specific focus on the economic needs of these areas. In its response to this recommendation, the Government has committed to considering this as part of the delay and reflection period for the ARFOR II programme. We think that officers of the City and Growth Deals operating in areas of higher density linguistic significance should be involved in discussions about the development of specific economic strategies for these areas. It is necessary to ensure that city and regional growth deals contribute directly to the success of these economic strategies in areas of particularly high linguistic significance, and that, across their regions, they contribute to the viability of the Welsh language.

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## Conclusions and the future of ARFOR

The ARFOR programme succeeded in coming together and rapidly developing a comprehensive programme once the Welsh Government announced it would fund it, and the programme's officials deserve credit for that. The programme review is full of examples of how the programme has made a difference to businesses and individuals living in the ARFOR area, and that is to be welcomed.

The ARFOR programme has begun to build a research foundation on the connection between the Welsh language and the economy, but more investment and the trialling of more interventions are needed to understand what are the best ways to support and strengthen the sustainability of Welsh language strongholds. The problems in these areas are complex, and therefore successful solutions are likely to be equally complex and would need to evolve as society evolves. We believe that the Welsh Government should commit to long-term investment in order to build on the foundations of ARFOR.

One criticism that we have consistently heard about ARFOR is that restricting funding to four counties deprives other areas with a high density of speakers outside the programme's current boundaries. We believe it would be more inclusive to coordinate any future funding with the effort to establish areas of higher linguistic intensity, in line with the main recommendation of the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities.

We hope you'll 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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