



Delyth Jewell MS
Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations
Committee
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Dear Chair,

Call for further evidence on the implications of the Census data for the legislative framework that supports Welsh-Medium Education

The Census results were disappointing, and they are further proof of some of the main messages of our written evidence submitted in September. Whilst there is no need to despair, there must be honesty about what the evidence highlights, and about the obvious challenges that exist. There are obvious gaps and weaknesses in the implementation of key elements of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. The most important and significant of these is the planning of a bilingual education workforce.

What challenges does the decrease in the number of Welsh speakers pose for local authority delivery of WESPs?

At a national level there has been little increase in Welsh medium education intake over the last decade. The census results reflect once again that the English medium sector has limited contribution to the aim of creating new Welsh speakers. If we are to reverse this situation, then the Government needs to significantly strengthen elements of legislation and policy that support the WESPs. It's not a viable option to continue with the same kind of strategies and policies that have clearly failed in the past. The introduction of the new WESP framework was an important step forwards, and the Government now needs to do all it can to empower key elements of these strategic plans. This includes funding decisions for education capital projects, the legislative process for moving schools along a linguistic continuum, and the introduction of a legislative mechanism to raise expectations and standards in English medium schools. It will not be possible for any of the above to succeed unless the Government develops a more robust strategy to radically increase the number of teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh.

What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium education provision in light of the Census data, and more specifically, the challenge of ensuring pupils in the English-medium sector are fluent as they leave school?

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We do not believe that the Government currently have a realistic strategy for achieving the aim of ensuring that pupils in the English medium sector are fluent Welsh speakers as they leave school. It's a glaring gap in the strategy and trajectory to reach a million speakers by 2050. As our previous evidence detailed, a clear and robust legislative mechanism needs to be set to implement this key policy.

One of the main barriers hindering the above policy is the lack of a workforce capable of teaching through the medium of Welsh.

What funding considerations might be needed going forward to support the full development of the WESPs given the decrease in the number of Welsh speakers?

One obvious funding consideration is the significant capital funding the Government allocates to local authorities for the purpose of opening and reorganising schools. The Government needs to do all it can to ensure that this funding fully facilitates the achievement of the targets and objectives of Cymraeg 2050 and also the local objectives and targets of the WESPs.

A specific funding and support package needs to be developed for schools that commit to moving along the language continuum. A much more strategic use of existing budgets (for example those of the Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme, Education Improvement Grant and Regional Consortia School Improvement Grants) could be part of this solution.

The financial consideration that has the potential to have the greatest impact is ensuring an increasingly bilingual education workforce. The education workforce is key to the success of WESPs, and more broadly to the Cymraeg 2050 objectives and targets. It is within the Government's capacity to introduce a bold strategy to provide language training to the whole education workforce. There needs to be a revolution in the way we develop the Welsh language skills of the education workforce. Without significant intervention, we will likely see an endless cycle where a shortage of bilingual carers, teachers and lecturers will be an ongoing barrier to achieving an increase in the number of school leavers able to speak and use Welsh. The Welsh Education Bill is an opportunity to break this cycle, and to ensure that the remaining Welsh 2050 objectives are within reach.

Yours sincerely

Lowri Williams

Strategic Director, Welsh Language Commissioner