



Equality, Human Rights and Social Justice Committee
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Dear Chair,

Consultation: Priorities for the Equality, Human Rights and Social Justice Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. I recently published a five-year report on the situation of the Welsh language, which provides a detailed analysis of the 2021 Census results in relation to the Welsh language. The report goes beyond the census figures by examining in detail policy areas that are central to creating more Welsh speakers and increasing the use of the Welsh language.

As highlighted in the report, the Welsh language is not a marginal policy area that stands alone; it should be central to every policy and legislative agenda introduced by the new Welsh Government. The Committee should therefore ensure that the impact of public policies on the Welsh language and its speakers is considered as a core element of its scrutiny of matters relating to equality, human rights and social justice.

In this context, I suggest two specific areas that the Committee should prioritise.

1. The Welsh language as a matter of equality, human rights and social justice

Although language is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 states that Welsh has official status in Wales, and the implementation of Welsh language standards enables Welsh speakers to exercise their rights to use the language. As argued by the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities, in Wales the Welsh language therefore operates as though it were a protected characteristic. The Committee should therefore regard the Welsh language as a central part of its work on equality, human rights and social justice:

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- The Committee should scrutinise how equitable access to Welsh-language services is across Wales. Particular attention should be given to the extent to which Welsh speakers are able to receive services through the medium of Welsh. As part of this, consideration should be given to the intersectionality of Welsh speakers' experiences.
- Linked to the above point, the Committee should pay particular attention to individuals' ability to use Welsh in key areas where the ability to use the language is essential to a person's dignity, safety or wellbeing. This includes areas such as health and social care, additional learning needs, and the justice system.
- One of the recommendations in our five-year report on the situation of the Welsh language was that the Welsh language standards regime should be extended to additional organisations and sectors. While detailed scrutiny of how the Government implements its commitment to extend and strengthen the Welsh language standards framework will be the responsibility of other Senedd committees, this Committee should consider how this work improves the experiences of Welsh speakers and increases opportunities for individuals to use Welsh.
- The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 contains provisions relating to interference with an individual's freedom to use the Welsh language. However, as part of the Government's focus on fair work, the Committee should consider issues relating to inclusive working environments and the extent to which legal rights to use Welsh are respected. The Committee should also consider how workplaces provide opportunities for individuals to use Welsh at work, and how ensuring opportunities to develop Welsh-language skills is fundamental to achieving fair work.

2. Equality, inclusion and social exclusion

- As part of the Government's commitment to tackling child poverty, the Committee should specifically consider the impact of poverty on young people's ability to access Welsh-medium education, services and activities.
- Recent reports from the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities recommend that detailed consideration should be given to the impact of social and economic structures and conditions on opportunities to acquire and use Welsh, and on people's ability to participate in community activity more generally. The Committee should scrutinise how the Welsh Government responds to the Commission's recommendations and, as part of this, consider how factors such as deprivation, socio-economic status, occupation, ethnicity, disability and geography affect opportunities for individuals and communities to learn and use Welsh.
- In line with a recommendation of the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities, the Welsh Government has committed to establishing a task and finish group to examine issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to the Welsh language, particularly in areas of higher density linguistic significance. The



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Committee should scrutinise the work of this group, considering the equality and social cohesion issues that exist in areas of higher density linguistic significance as well as in areas with lower densities of Welsh speakers.

Many of the issues discussed above are likely to be of interest to other Senedd committees, particularly the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language and Sport Committee. We would therefore encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to collaborate with other Senedd committees when considering the Welsh language within discussions on equality, human rights and social justice.

I hope the above comments are helpful as you plan the Committee's future work. I wish you every success in that work and would be pleased to contribute further.

Yours sincerely,

Efa Gruffudd Jones
Welsh Language Commissioner