

The Enterprise and Learning Committee

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CYDAG: Association of Schools in favour of Welsh Medium Education

The Transformation Agenda: Matters of interest to the Committee

This is a response on behalf of CYDAG that focuses mainly on Welsh-medium and bilingual provision. Over 25 per cent of secondary schools in Wales are members of CYDAG. CYDAG's viewpoint thus represents the views of a not inconsiderable proportion of providers. Moreover, to all intents and purposes, CYDAG represents the vast majority of 14-19 providers, as far as Welsh-medium and bilingual provision is concerned.

Accordingly, CYDAG believes that its views on the Transformation Agenda warrant serious consideration by the Enterprise and Learning Committee. The Transformation Agenda could develop in a way that will have an impact on Welsh-medium education, for better or worse.

It is fitting that the Enterprise and Learning Committee is considering this issue within the same timeframe as the publication of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy by the Welsh Assembly Government, on 20 April 2010.

Two key WAG documents contain direct references to the challenges faced in developing Welsh-medium provision.

In *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales (2008)*, footnote 9 on Page 7 of the document includes the following statement: 'It is recognised that there are particular problems in some rural areas and for Welsh-medium schools which are geographically distant from other Welsh-medium providers. Here, the issue of cost-effectiveness has to be considered in terms of the overall benefits for learners.'

Meanwhile, paragraph 60 on Page 20 of "*Transformation—Y Siwrnai*" (WAG, November 2009) includes the following observations: 'Proposals for transforming provision are expected to be drawn up in such a way that they improve the extent and range of Welsh-medium opportunities for learners...'; and, 'Further consideration will need to be given to particular transformational approaches and effective working practices specifically for Welsh-medium and bilingual partnerships'.

Other than the formation of three Welsh-medium education forums (see below), CYDAG does not feel that the commitments laid out in the two documents cited above have, as of yet, led to concrete actions by senior WAG officials. This opinion is based on the nature and consistency of responses given by officials during events held over the last two years, including as recently as spring 2010. The lack of leadership shown by WAG is reflected in many of the comments seen in the evidence cited in the remainder of this statement.

The intentions and commitments seem clear, yet we are still waiting for their implementation.

Structural Changes

A. Progress towards learning partnerships across different local authorities in Wales.

According to CYDAG members, progress has been made towards establishing learning partnerships across the Welsh local authorities. There is some variation in the pace and nature of this progress.

The attention paid to Welsh-medium education in these discussions, or the lack of it, is of key interest to CYDAG, as well as to WAG, in light of the publication of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy. Too often, the attention paid to the Welsh language in some areas, including traditionally bilingual areas, is marginal at best. In addition, due to their isolated status as the only Welsh-medium providers within their respective authorities, some schools feel pressurised to compromise their language policies by establishing bilingual courses (which vary in terms of their on the Welsh language), or even English-medium courses. This is unacceptable. The Welsh-medium Education Strategy makes clear pronouncements on the importance of sustaining, protecting and, in fact, strengthening Welsh-medium provision, given that this is the best way of developing learners' language skills. There is significant concern that the Transformation Agenda, in several respects, is undermining rather than safeguarding and developing Welsh-medium education.

B. Progress towards learning partnerships across different local authorities in Wales.

The structures of three Welsh-medium education forums had been established by December 2009. The north Wales forum was established in the summer of 2008, while the south-east Wales forum and the mid and south-west Wales forum were not established until December 2009.

The forums' role is to promote cooperation across the 14-19 Learning Networks within their respective catchment areas, with the aim of extending bilingual and Welsh-medium provision by creating new post-16 vocational courses across these networks.

Two of the three forums are very new, yet there is a strong sense that there is a role for all three in expanding provision within the forums themselves, and also through developing links and collaborative processes across the forums. There are also ways to develop opportunities for collaboration, to reduce duplication in the preparation of resources, to share best practices, to promote new ways of cooperating (e.g. e-learning) and so forth.

A. How much consultation is taking place with schools and colleges?

According to members' responses, this varies in general terms. There is also variation in terms of consultation on Welsh-medium provision. Indeed, in some well-publicised cases, there was no consultation at all, even though the intentions of local authorities were radical and, in CYDAG's opinion, posed a huge threat to the provision of Welsh-medium education, if adopted. The nature and quality of such consultation is entirely unsatisfactory and unacceptable. Indeed, the way in which attempts were made to transform the provision contravene the fundamental principles of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy itself, as well as the stated five- and 10-year aims of the strategy.

In some areas, governing bodies express dissatisfaction with the timelines allocated for local consultation and for presenting schemes to the Assembly, saying that they are too short. Some governors—including some industrious and conscientious ones—often have difficulty in fully comprehending the implications due to time pressures.

B. How much consultation is taking place with schools and colleges?

These forums have been discussed with schools that provide Welsh-language and bilingual services. The remaining further education colleges have since been invited to these discussions. Steps are also being taken to ensure that all training providers are included in these forums (they are already members of the north Wales forum).

Specific issues that have been experienced in terms of Welsh-medium provision

CYDAG and its members have major frustrations over the serious lack of attention that has been paid to securing the rights of learners to access Welsh-medium education.

Two key documents have been published by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS): the original Transformation Agenda document (known as "the Terracotta Document") and then "Y Siwrnai". Specific references are made in both documents to the need to give careful consideration to Welsh-medium provision; it is partly suggested that there may be a need for different or discriminating consideration in order to secure such provision. Other than the paragraphs that include these discrete references (literally, just one or two paragraphs in the texts as a whole), no further details have been given on how these objectives may be achieved.

DCELLS officials, including some senior officials responsible for the Transformation Agenda, were asked to put some meat on the bones during several regional conferences and in various commentaries. Despite this, no further light was shed on how DCELLS views the way ahead in terms of securing the rights of learners to receive education and training through the medium of Welsh.

Another example of this arose during a recent DCELLS conference on Learning Pathways 14-19. A designated Welsh-medium school posed a question about the challenge of running small learning groups comprising, say, learners who need Level 1 courses. They were told that they would have to collaborate with nearby schools to create manageable groups. This response did not take into account the principle of running the group through the medium of Welsh, which is what the learners and their parents had chosen in the first place.

The solutions that may satisfy needs on a practical level in English-medium urban situations do not meet the challenge of securing people's rights to receive Welsh-medium education in many parts of Wales. It should also be noted that similar challenges face schools, colleges and other providers that are trying to satisfy the needs of learners in rural parts of Wales, which represent a very large geographical chunk of the country's surface area.

A number of members noted that they already view the role played by the three forums as indispensable, even though they are still in their infancy, particularly in cases where the availability of local partners that can work through the medium of Welsh is limited.

These are some of the challenges faced in providing Welsh-medium experiences:

The limited number of potential providers of Welsh-medium courses;

Running small groups;

Meeting the costs of forming joint groups between two or more organisations, given that transportation costs are considerable;

Finding personnel who can provide services through the medium of Welsh, particularly in extending Level 2 vocational provision, and more still at Level 3;

The fact that, even when appropriate personnel are found, Welsh-medium provision can come to an abrupt halt if those people leave their jobs for whatever reason (moving to another area, illness, pregnancy and so forth). In other words, there is a random element in the system;

Even with the introduction and development of the vocational side of provision, the use of video conferencing is of limited assistance in delivering the necessary provision;

Continuing to produce teaching and learning materials to allow for the extension of provision;

Ensuring that every aspect of assessment and accreditation is easily available through the medium of Welsh; and

While finances are available to develop new courses under the requirements of the Measure, that money cannot be used to run courses in the long term. This means that a school sets up a course and runs it for a year or two, but then discontinues it (due to a lack of

finances) before turning its attention to a new course (which would attract fresh money).

Impact on teaching staff

In order to be able to provide some new vocational courses through the medium of Welsh, many schools have retrained their staff in these areas so that they can fulfil the aspirations of learners. There are some rare examples where further education colleges have also trained their staff or used sabbatical schemes to allow their staff to provide Welsh-medium services. Having said this, the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, in terms of increasing the number of vocational courses, stretches staffing capabilities to the limit. In a number of areas, the necessary staffing resources are not available to provide the number and range of vocational courses required under statute. Meeting these requirements will be tougher still by September 2011, when the statutory requirements for post-16 Level 3 courses come into effect.

Due to the need to transfer students to other sites to access new courses, there are several examples of teachers spending time in transit with those students because they are the ones teaching the course at the other site (which has vital resources such as training workshops and so forth). This is one of the many examples of additional costs associated with implementing the 14-19 agenda (in terms of staffing, time and financial resources).

Having said that, the responses to surveys on parents' aspirations regarding Welsh-medium education in Newport, the Vale of Glamorgan, Wrexham and Flint raise even more questions regarding the availability of staff who can provide Welsh-medium education across every age range. This also raises the question of how many schools would be sufficient to fulfil this aspiration.

Securing a workforce to deliver Welsh-medium education is one of the six strategic aims of WAG's Welsh-medium Education Strategy.

Welsh-medium trainers and lecturers—bursaries in areas where there are shortages.

Due to the complexity and uncertainty of implementing the Transformation Agenda, classroom and office staff at schools are not fully aware (if at all) of the nature and speed of the discussions underway in several local authorities. Some members feel that there is a serious lack of quality time available to work through the agenda in a meaningful way, and in a way that would allow every member of the workforce to realise what is going on and to contribute. As one member said, "I see a storm on the horizon."

Merging further education colleges

CYDAG does not have much to say on this issue, other than to **state clearly** that every merger must give operational consideration to the development plan for Welsh-medium provision in the 'new' college. This should include action, set against unambiguous timelines, on how to ensure the availability of courses that will ensure continuity in terms of the Welsh-language skills of learners (first or second language), as well as securing Welsh-medium courses.

Again, reference is made to this in WAG's Welsh-medium Education Strategy. It is also interesting to look at the National Strategy on Bilingualism in Further Education, published recently by CollegesWales.

Has there been a decrease in the duplication of provision, and are there fewer gaps in the provision?

Considerable efforts have certainly been made to achieve these aims.

Nevertheless, in terms of securing Welsh-medium provision without compromising the policies of schools and local authorities, on paper it appears that there is still some duplication of courses. This does not take into account the logistical difficulties (e.g. travelling distances) and financial costs (e.g. transport costs) of arrangements that could eliminate cases of duplication.

Reference was made earlier to the challenge of filling gaps in Welsh-medium provision in terms of the availability of teaching and training staff, teaching and learning resources, and ensuring that arrangements for assessment, moderation and accreditation can be made as easily through the medium of Welsh as they are through the medium of English for every learner, without exception, in every part of Wales.

Changes in terms of choice

Progress on Learning Pathways 14-19

In general terms, progress has been made. As stated previously, it was not made easily, and several schools feel that their language policies are under pressure due to a limited number of partners that can provide Welsh-medium courses.

The Welsh-medium education forums have enjoyed some success, even though they are in their infancy. For example, there are plans to introduce eight new Welsh-medium post-16 vocational courses in September 2010. This involves collaboration among schools, colleges and training providers. The courses will be offered across the individual 14-19 Learning Networks, with courses being offered across as many as four networks in some cases.

Course facilitators and forum members believe that the forums have great potential to act as catalysts for the promotion of more Welsh-medium provision within the three forums and across the forums.

Concerns regarding what happens when Learning Pathways funding comes to an end were cited earlier. As has been noted, there have already been cases of schools discontinuing courses and introducing new courses that attract fresh money.

CYDAG also feels very strongly that the Transformation Agenda and the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure are going to prove very costly if the principle of maintaining, protecting and extending Welsh-medium provision (one of the key objectives of WAG's Welsh-medium Education Strategy) is adhered to.

Are there more vocational options available for Year 9 and Year 11 pupils?

Undoubtedly, Year 9 pupils have more choice.

There has been some progress in the range of options offered to Year 11 pupils. The majority of schools and areas continue to see significant challenges in expanding the Welsh-medium and bilingual vocational menu, though there are exceptions in some areas.

In focusing on progress on the vocational menu, three concurrent factors should not be disregarded.

First, expanding the menu by introducing more courses and fulfilling the needs of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure would inevitably lead to a lower average class size. That is, unit costs would increase.

Secondly, different 'academic' subjects in different areas are being squeezed enormously by the growth in vocational courses. This limits and reduces choice for learners who want to pursue those courses. Schools will find it increasingly difficult to offer these subjects. It is foreseen that it will be very difficult to offer some of these subjects in the financial climate anticipated for the four years ahead of us.

Thirdly, and contrary to the previous paragraph, pupils are not embracing the vocational content in some schools, even though the schools have taken great trouble to try to identify appropriate courses, based on the views of pupils and on the work carried out previously in establishing courses. In these situations, it is hard to justify the vocational menu, even though there is a statutory requirement on schools to do so.

Fourthly, in his speech to the Learning Pathways conference that was held by the Institute of Welsh Affairs at the Welsh Joint Education Committee on 25 March, the Minister stated at least three times that expanding choice could lead to tough decisions having to be made at a local level. Here is an excerpt from his presentation:

'Better choices for learners sometimes entail tough institutional decisions for those who offer provision, which include many of you in this room. The paradox of choice. It is likely that we will need to narrow the range of academic options if we are to broaden the vocational agenda, maintain key skills and maintain strategic subjects. That is the paradox of choice. And it is the language of priorities.'

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: THIS IS A TRANSLATED VERSION]

This statement, which was repeated three times, emphasises the need for a more detailed understanding of the Minister's words. One interpretation is that institutions and networks should consider whether the menu includes minority 'academic' subjects, or those that are comparatively 'redundant', at the expense of presenting and developing a vocational menu in mainstream subject areas that are vital for the economy and, therefore, for the workforce of the future. Another interpretation, however, is that core, mainstream 'academic' courses, such as the non-core subjects of the National Curriculum, including music, art, the humanities and modern languages, could be abolished in certain localities. If the second interpretation of Minister's comments is the correct one, this raises fundamental questions about these subjects within the National Curriculum. It also raises issues relating to the value of educational and financial investment in these courses up to the age of 14, if there is no continuity during the 14-19 stage.

Finally, many schools expressed concern over recent uncertainty surrounding the exact requirements of post-16 provision from September 2011. It is rumoured that there will be a need to aim for 10 'academic' courses, 10 'vocational' courses and 10 'others'. This would create regulatory pressure at the level of institutions, local partnerships, authorities, networks and forums.

Are local curricula being established or timetabled, and what effect would this have on teaching staff and lecturers?

There have been some innovative examples of staff being jointly employed by more than one institution in order to fulfil the requirements of pupils at those different institutions. This process has been formal and careful, including detailed discussion of the arrangements with the job candidates. This has been a significant factor in expanding the menu choices at these institutions.

There have been many examples of retraining staff by redirecting them from their main realms of expertise to new, often vocational, fields. This must be done carefully and thoroughly to safeguard the interests of staff members and the quality of provision for learners. There are costs attached to retraining programmes of this kind.

In some areas, the local curriculum is, by definition, an English-medium one since there is only one Welsh-medium school in the area, or else there is more than one school but these institutions are a long way apart. Pupils who want Welsh-medium education and training cannot gain access to a wider local curriculum without compromising on the language in which they are taught or trained. These situations are generating linguistic tensions in several locations.

In some areas, there have been efforts to harmonise timetables (or parts of them). However, this does not eliminate the need for staff or learners to travel. This travel time can be significant and can add or subtract an hour or more from the school day.

In addition, efforts to timetable jointly by holding courses at separate sites can harm the continuity of the learner's learning programme on his or her 'home patch'. This often affects those pupils who are most in need of support and motivation.

Has there been any progress in the use of digital learning resources, and what impact will this have?

Progress has been made in digital learning. It is fair to say that, in general, only initial steps have been taken. Excellent resources have been produced simultaneously in the Welsh and English languages, and the institutions that use them (and have taken part in their development) view them as an important addition to their pedagogic content.

Where digital learning is used, some members say that its impact is mainly seen in courses that have an academic flavour. It has not been of much use, until now, to those very courses that need to be promoted and shared, namely those in vocational fields.

Other areas say that the picture varies from school to school, though in general, it has not made much of an impact.

In one area, it is said that there is much more talk than action. The view that there is potential to address the issue of digital learning through the forums has also been expressed.

Video-conferencing equipment has been used by many schools to introduce new Welsh-medium and bilingual courses. A range of presentation methods have been used, as well as different procedures for monitoring and securing support for learners. These experiences vary in terms of quality and the standard of outcomes. Moreover, practical challenges have been encountered in terms of integrating video-conferencing provision within the timetabling arrangements of institutions, including the timetables of the course providers and the institutions that receive the provision.

Has there been progress on support for learners, such as the use of learning coaches?

The short answer to this question is 'yes'. There has been progress in terms of the personal support experienced by pupils.

Having said this, in general terms, pupils at CYDAG schools have enjoyed high-quality personal support for years. Pastoral care, including advice and guidance, is one key area of inquiry for Estyn where schools have achieved consistently high ratings.

Regarding the impact of Learning Pathways 14-19, numerous staff members in different categories have been trained as learning champions. This has not been trouble-free. The quality of training has varied from place to place and from one cohort to another. Secondly, there has been a major lack of clarity regarding the nature of the role, the expectations in terms of how to provide support under the Learning Pathways banner, and how this has sat (and will sit) alongside existing provision.

Many schools have expressed concern about the cost of providing support through learning champions, given that funding is unavailable for the additional jobs that are needed at some institutions.

Are pupils with additional learning needs coping?

Yes, in general terms. In some cases, experiences that were previously the preserve of pupils with ALN have been mainstreamed.

In general, schools have taken care to ensure that every pupil has an equal opportunity to receive a full education and, in tandem with implementing the inclusion agenda, to ensure that every pupil, including those with ALN, has access to the full menu.

There is dissatisfaction among CYDAG's membership that level 1 courses (and post-16 level 2 courses) do not receive financial recognition from the central regime in Cardiff. This could hinder ALN provision. CYDAG believes that this is an affront to pupils with ALN who need such courses, both in terms of their basic rights and in terms of how the courses can be adapted to develop these pupils' potential.

This has entailed detailed planning with pupils and their parents, a variety of external agencies, including partner providers, and so forth, to ensure that:

Appropriate decisions are made to fulfil the needs of the pupil;

Appropriate learning support is provided in every learning context, including making the best use of teaching assistants;

Appropriate transportation arrangements are made; and

If relevant, the external provider is fully briefed on the ALN in each individual case

This evidence is presented on behalf of CYDAG members.

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