

MINUTES

Date: Friday, 15 March 2002
Time: 10.00 am to 12.50pm
Venue: Miners' Welfare Hall, Ammanford

Attendance: Members

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Chair)	Carmarthen East & Dinefwr
Peter Black	South Wales West
Cynog Dafis	Mid & West Wales
Andrew Davies	Swansea West
Glyn Davies	Mid and West Wales
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
Edwina Hart	Gower
Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
Dai Lloyd	South Wales West

Presenters:

Alun Davies	Director of Education, Carmarthenshire County Council
Mererid Hopwood	Rhieni dros Addysg Gymreig (RhAG) Parents for Welsh Medium Education
Medwin Hughes	Principal, Trinity College, Carmarthen
Mererid James	Ysgol Gyfun Bro Myrddin
Rhys Jones	Amman Valley Comprehensive School

Sarah Lewis	Ysgol y Gwendraeth
Rhian Lewis	Ysgol y Gwendraeth
Stuart Matthias	Director of Learning Services, Carmarthenshire College of Technology & Art
Sarah Phillips	Amman Valley Comprehensive School
Leila Salisbury	Ysgol Gyfun Bro Myrddin
Committee Secretariat	
Jane Westlake	Committee Clerk
Claire Morris	Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1: Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Nick Bourne	Mid and West Wales
Richard Edwards	Preseli Pembrokeshire
Brian Gibbons	Aberavon
Christine Gwyther	Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire
Val Lloyd	Swansea East
Gwenda Thomas	Neath

Item 2: Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education

2.1 Cynog Dafis, Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee outlined the background to the policy review being undertaken by that Committee. The aim of the review was to identify a strategy to meet the challenges set out in the Welsh Language Board's vision and mission document, namely:

- To increase the number of people who were able to speak Welsh;
- Provide opportunities to use the language;
- Change habits of language use and encourage people to take advantage of the opportunities provided' and
- Strengthen Welsh as a community language.

The Committee had consulted over 2,000 organisations, including all schools and higher education establishments in Wales. A number of organisations had already presented oral evidence to the Committee and they would also be receiving expert advice. The Committee would also be looking at the experiences of Canada and the Basque Country. Evidence to date had emphasized the need for increased provision of Welsh medium education as current demand was exceeding supply and the Committee would be considering different models of provision.

2.2 Alun Davies, Director of Education, Carmarthenshire County Council, made the following points:

- The authority was committed to the development of the Welsh language in schools.
- A Welsh education scheme was in place, which had been accepted and reviewed by the Welsh Language Board.
- All schools in Carmarthenshire were committed to increasing the number of subjects taught through the medium of Welsh.
- The authority was attempting to address through its strategic plan the reduction in the number of pupils between key stage 2 and key stage 3 being taught through the medium of Welsh.
- There were difficulties in achieving parity of provision in Welsh medium education in small rural primary schools. The authority was committed to improving standards and equity across the county.

2.3 In response to comments from Members, Alun Davies made the following additional points:

- There was a problem in recruiting teachers generally, not just Welsh medium. Carmarthenshire did not have any actual shortages at the moment and he was working closely with colleagues to make sure it did not become a problem in the future.
- Research had not been undertaken into the reasons for the reduction in numbers of pupils learning through Welsh between key stages 2 and 3 but it was believed to be because of social reasons or peer group pressure.
- He was not aware of any evidence that supported the view that smaller, rural primary schools were more committed or effective at teaching Welsh than any other type of school. In fact, evidence suggested pupils at larger schools achieved just as well as those in smaller schools.
- If a rural school were closed due to falling rolls, the local community would be consulted on its most effective use to further community development.
- There were no plans to re-organise schools within the county that would alter their categorisation
- A category A school was defined as one where Welsh was the main language of the school. It also included schools where most of the education was provided through the medium of Welsh

and these schools were being encouraged to develop and teach more subjects in Welsh.

2.4 Rhian Lewis and Sarah Lewis, pupils at Ysgol y Gwendraeth made the following points:

- Bilingualism was very important as it developed personal skills and expanded employment opportunities.
- Forcing young people to speak Welsh in school often turned them against the language and the status and use of Welsh amongst young people was decreasing.
- At GCSE level the distinction should be made between Welsh taken as a first or second language. This would reflect ability more fairly.
- If pupils were planning to go to an English university they should not be forced to take A levels through the medium of Welsh where this could be a disadvantage to them.
- Key skills qualifications could be re-taken up to four times in English but only once in Welsh. The same opportunities should be available in Welsh.
- Welsh courses should be made available for teachers that wanted to use the language in their lessons.

2.5 Leila Salisbury and Mererid James, pupils of Ysgol Gyfun Bro Myrddin, made the following points:

- There were two languages in education and it was essential that this be recognised.
- Only a quarter of pupils were educated through the medium of Welsh.
- In Welsh medium schools all subjects should be taught in Welsh.
- The ability to understand two languages made children think more flexibly.
- Welsh should be used as often as possible to ensure it was a natural language to children.
- Learning Welsh in nursery and primary schools was no use if it was not possible to continue this into secondary and higher education.
- Learning through the Welsh language was not a burden but a privilege.
- Young people were concerned that they would not be able to secure employment in England if they had received their education through the medium of Welsh.

2.6 Sarah Phillips and Rhys Jones, pupils of Amman Valley Comprehensive School, made the following points:

- Amman Valley School was not a designated bilingual school but prided itself on being naturally bilingual and offered parents and pupils a variety of choices with regard to bilingual education.
- Pupils could choose to study all subjects, except science and maths, through the medium of Welsh; or study 40% of subjects in Welsh; or study 12% of subjects through Welsh, as a first or second language.
- The school provided opportunities to participate in social and extra-curricular activities bilingually including participation in a Welsh and English school production and the annual eisteddfod.

2.7 In response to comments from Members, the following points were made:

- There were a number of clubs and organisations that enabled young people to use Welsh outside school. In Carmarthen, there was a specialist music society; Aeloed Myrddin provided an opportunity for pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 to meet although there was nothing for older pupils; and Mentre Cwm Gwendraeth organised activities through the medium of Welsh. Also the National Eisteddfod provided an opportunity for young people to develop and use their Welsh language skills.
- It was important to encourage others and give them the confidence to use Welsh, which would raise awareness of the language.
- There were not many text books available in Welsh so a lot of class time was taken up in translating from English text books.
- Schools should run Welsh classes for non-Welsh speaking parents so they could socialise with their children in Welsh and help them with school work.

2.8 Mererid Hopwood, Rhieni dros Addysg Gymreig (RhAG) (Parents for Welsh Medium Education) made the following points:

- There was a danger that the language would be lost before people realised its true value.
- At present, totally Welsh medium education was not available in Carmarthenshire. Parents and children in the county should have the same opportunity to access Welsh medium education as other parts of Wales.
- Whilst some parents believed that science and maths could not be taught effectively in Welsh there was no evidence to support this, and this was giving children the idea that Welsh was in some way inferior to English.
- If the language was to gain equal respect it needed to take its place in all areas and aspects of education.
- A recent study undertaken by ELWa had highlighted a significant demand from employers for bilingual skills.
- Education and training through Welsh needed to be developed in the higher and further education sector. Teachers needed the confidence to teach subjects through the medium of Welsh.
- Continuity of provision was very important to enable children to progress from nursery right through to university through the medium of Welsh.

2.9 In response to Members' comments, the following additional points were made:

- It was natural for children to rebel against their parents in the context of Welsh language education. This was unlikely to cause lasting harm if they were soundly grounded in the language. The role of education was to give children the bilingual skills they needed.
- People should be encouraged to use Welsh, whatever their level of proficiency.

Item 3 : Open Microphone Session

3.1 Members of the public were invited to put questions and comments to the Committee. Questions that could not be answered at the meeting would be passed to the appropriate Minister to provide a written response.

Ffred Ffransis, Welsh Language Society said that ACCAC should review the curriculum so that education would be more relevant to communities and highlighted the importance of village schools in sustaining Welsh speaking communities, both as schools and as a facility for the rest of the population. He also suggested that greater priority should be given to vocational education through the medium of Welsh.

Cynog Dafis, Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, said that the Education Bill currently going through Parliament would transfer comprehensive powers regarding the curriculum to the Assembly, which would enable the creation of a Welsh National Curriculum in its entirety.

Aled Davies, Consortiwm Cymraeg I Oedolion Dyfed said that Welsh for Adults was currently funded through the further education funding formula, which was based upon numbers in classes and this impacted on the ability to hold courses in rural areas. He asked that the Assembly consider moving towards a funding level and structure based on need to sustain the necessary level of service to enable Welsh for Adults to make a contribution to creating a bilingual Wales.

Heini Gruffudd, Lecturer, Swansea University said that he had been involved in a number of research projects regarding linguistic continuity between the primary and secondary sector in Carmarthenshire. One of the findings had been that, in the primary schools that served bilingual secondary schools in the area, about 70-75% of pupils were educated through the medium of Welsh, studied Welsh as a first language and took their Standard Assessment Tasks and Tests (SATs) in Welsh. However, on moving to secondary education, only 30-35% of those pupils went on to study and take some of their subjects through Welsh as a first language. This meant that 40% was being lost between primary and secondary education.

The Chair asked that information on these findings be made available to members of the Committee.

Kevin Campbell, Mentur y Iaith Myrddin said that there was a lack of continuity in Welsh medium education from primary to secondary schools and a substantial decrease in the number of children who studied Welsh as a first language. There were also areas in Dinefwr and the Upper Amman Valley where there was no access to Welsh medium education.

William John complained that the article and photographs of St David's Day events in

local schools had appeared in the South Wales Guardian in English only.

The Chair said that next time he met the Editor of the paper he would make that point to him.

Elin Davies, DYSG outlined the difficulties being faced by the project as a result of receiving only short term funding.

The Minister for Finance, Local Government & Communities said that the Assembly had tried to establish three year funding streams. She would take up the issue with the appropriate Minister and try and establish exactly how the project had been funded.

Cllr Siân Thomas said that parents should have the choice to educate their children through Welsh only, English only or a mixture of both. In Carmarthenshire, children were not being given the opportunity to have Welsh medium secondary education to the extent that parents would wish. Greater provision was needed for pupils who did not want to go to university to be able to study in the community through the medium of Welsh.

Item 4: Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education

4.1 Medwin Hughes, Principal of Trinity College, Carmarthen, made the following points:

- Of 1000 trainee teachers in Wales only 200 undertake their training through the medium of Welsh.
- There was concern about the quality of trainees coming into the profession and it was suggested that consideration be given to a marketing campaign to attract Welsh speakers into the sector.
- Different teaching models were needed to develop skills, as currently only one college offered bilingual provision. There was also a need for an infrastructure to support trainees once they had started work.
- There was a shortage of books and material in Welsh, particularly in the further and vocational education sectors, and it was suggested that a warehouse of materials be established for secondary and higher education and universities. Dr Hughes would provide a business plan.
- Greater accountability with regard to funding was required.
- Secondary, higher and further education sectors needed to collaborate and share resources for the benefit of Wales.

4.2 Stuart Matthias, Director of Learning Services, Carmarthenshire College of Technology and Art, made the following points:

- Students who finished courses bilingually gained employment more quickly.
- The college was committed to encouraging and facilitating all students to work bilingually, to develop bilingual education and training and develop the linguistic skills of students, and Welsh-

speaking tutors were provided where there was a need.

- The demand for vocational courses was increasing and students were offered the opportunity to take part in their course bilingually or through the medium of Welsh, but few took it up.
- An important factor in the development of bilingualism in a college was the support of the governing body and management team.

4.3 In response to Members comments, Stuart Matthias said:

- 243 courses were available at Carmarthenshire College of Technology and Art but only 16% of staff had the full linguistic competence to deliver courses through the medium of Welsh, and it was suggested that resources should be ring-fenced for the further linguistic development of staff.
- A strategy was being developed to create collaborative partnerships with local schools but this was being made more difficult because schools had adopted a fortnightly timetable.

4.4 Medwin Hughes also made the following additional comments:

- There was a lack of context in Further Education in Wales for developing bilingualism.
- A great deal of funding went into the provision of bilingual services and it was important that the use of the money was monitored and evaluated.
- It was not efficient to have different agencies such as Skilliaeth and Dysg carrying out the same function. They should all be brought together.

Item 5: Minutes of last meeting (25 January 2002)

Paper: SWWR-01-02(min)

5.1 The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

Item 6: Date of next meeting

6.1 The next meeting would be held on 24 May 2002 in Pembrokeshire (venue to be confirmed), when the Committee would be discussing disability issues and the Economic Development Committee's energy review.