

Culture Committee - CC-10-01(p.1)

Date: 6th June 2001
Time: 10.00am-13.00pm
Venue: Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth

CULTURE COMMITTEE'S REVIEW OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE SUBMISSION BY:

URDD GOBAITH CYMRU

INTRODUCTION

The Urdd welcome the opportunity to present our views to the National Assembly Culture Committee and proud of the contribution which has been made by the Urdd to the promotion of Welsh as a living and relevant language for young people in Wales over almost 80 years since the movements launch in a magazine article in January 1922.

The Urdd has proved to be dynamic, inventive and energetic over the years and was instrumental in establishing the first Welsh medium school, the first films in Welsh, the promotion of magazines and books which lead to the establishment of the Welsh Book Council and a myriad of activities for children and young people from 8 to 25 years old - (although in reality the ages range from 6 to 30).

The Urdd continues to be inventive and continues to grow. Membership has grown from 42,000 in 1988 to 53,000 in 2000 and includes 25% of all ten year olds who live in Wales - a % unmatched by a voluntary organisation in any other country which we know of. Recent success has included a 37% increase in the over 16 membership between 1998 and 2000 and the growth of visitors to our web site from a few hundred in the first year in 1998 to a target of 100,000 this year 2001 - 2002 (1 million hits!). The web site has now grown to a point where we can attract a commercial sponsor and it forms a principal means of communication within the organisation and an effective marketing tool. Last week saw the first ever web cast of the Urdd Festival which attracted visitors from across the Globe.

The essential ethos of the Urdd's work is the provision and promotion of exciting and interesting activities in Welsh for children and young people across the whole of Wales targeted within three main age groups - junior schools and community branches, the secondary sector and the over 16's - the Urddaholics.

Activities include -

over 30,000 residential and 20,000 day visitors to the Residential Centres at Llangrannog and Glan-llyn.

Over 45,000 competitors in the Eisteddfodau Cylch reducing to 15,000 in the National Finals.

20,000 competitors in Sporting competitions and 10,000 swimmers.

Distribution of 90,000 magazines a year

A network of over 1,000 branches organised with the support of 10,000 volunteers.

In basic terms the Urdd activities provide an opportunity for children and young people to use their Welsh either as fluent speakers or as learners whilst taking part in activities as varied as trips to Euro Disney or Premier League Football games, visits to our web site or being creative in art craft, literature or the performing arts. Future plans include the WMC residential facility

"Gwersyll Caerdydd" and a soon to be launched Sports Strategy and redevelopment of the Llangrannog Centre.

THEME: FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

The Urdd is clearly a player in securing community empowerment and the development of community activities through the branch network - particularly in the rural Welsh heartland and through the work of volunteers. The invitation of an Urdd National Eisteddfod involves a three year period of fundraising activities and preparations which is normally a catalyst for community empowerment, networking and community development. The Eisteddfod itself involves a huge range of people from the very young to the very old and generates confidence, interest and greater awareness of the Welsh language and culture particularly amongst the school age membership of the Urdd.

The Urdd is developing a Curriculum for its Youth Work with volunteers which will involve training opportunities for the community branch volunteers.

The new I.T. Technology is of great interest to the Urdd as a marketing tool, an activity resource and a route for assessing members views on activities and issues. The number of 'visits' has risen dramatically in the last year from 5,000 to 50,000 people a year particularly since 8 digital cameras have enabled the showing of members on activities within hours e.g. sporting competitions and trips or events.

The Urdd is very much aware of Cardiff's draw for young people who often wish to migrate for social rather than employment opportunities. The pattern is similar to that seen in Ireland as Dublin developed into a vibrant capital although the pull of the west - Galway in particular is now acting somewhat in balance. The urge to travel and see the world will no doubt grow as young people's confidence in themselves and in Wales grows. To some extent the outward flow is unstoppable for the late teens/early twenties but may be redeemed as young people want to settle down having tasted the 'city lights'. Employment opportunities are fundamental to maintaining communities. The Urdd's response is to offer activities to members over 16 on an individual basis so that the geography of where you live is not so relevant. Clearly issues of transportation are fundamental to a young person's perception of being isolated or cut off from the best opportunities, for a 'good life'

THEME: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Urdd is proud of its developments as an employer of Welsh speakers across Wales but particularly in the rural heartland - 160 staff are employed and economic benefit to the local community for example at Llangrannog is estimated at over £2 million a year.

The view of Urdd members as customers who deserve a quality service is fundamental to our ethos, as is the attaining of quality standards e.g. Investor in People. The Urdd as an organisation is entrepreneurial and encourages the membership to be inventive, confident and individual. The "Her Challenge Cymru" project in partnership with seven other voluntary youth organisations is a particular success in this regard.

THEME: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

This is a crucial element to any planning and is a priority for the Urdd. Youth Work in Wales is virtually data-less and it is to be hoped that the efforts to establish an audit with quality data becomes a reality. We would welcome opportunities to co-operate with the Broadcasters,

Welsh Language Board and others to build a reliable picture of what exists and what works for young people.

THEME: BILINGUALISM AND GOODWILL

The Urdd has always promoted bilingualism and the fostering of the Welsh language in a positive confident non-threatening context. "Nothing succeeds like success" and the wave of enthusiasm for the Urdd and its activities over the last 10 years has been fed by a new confidence that the language is no longer in decline. The 2001 census data will be vital in maintaining the confidence and momentum. There is no doubt that the development of Cardiff as a true 'Capital' in Europe, the economic growth and development of the city in leisure, sporting and artistic terms is beginning to build a new confidence in Wales as a nation, and a viable entity. This confidence will transfer to the language an enhanced status in parallel with the growth in the number of speakers through the education system.

THEME: PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND DELIVERY STRUCTURES

The cross - cutting holistic approach is vital as well as efforts to work together as organisations who promote or develop use of the Welsh language. The Urdd is developing more and more partners in order to develop our activities and services - sports organisations, the National Eisteddfod and other voluntary youth organisations all provide useful partners. The ethos of working together is usually important especially if we are to move away from defensive or ??? attitudes by organisations or Welsh speakers in general. We must have confidence in ourselves before others can be persuaded.

CROSS CUTTING THEMES: The Urdd's role is clear as a facilitator and provider of opportunities to learn, work and play through the medium of Welsh in environments which are naturally 'Welsh' be they city centre or rural. Supporting the work of schools and influencing young peoples' attitudes and decisions to use their ability to learn or use the Welsh language is fundamental. Crucial to this aim is the provision of quality services and activities; indeed they need to be better than that available in 'English' and in many cases they are. We have in Wales an unique organisation in the Urdd, unique in its access to the cohort of children and young people and in the breadth, quality and variety of activities fundamental to which is the promotion of Welsh as a living language relevant to the lives of young people in Wales today, a language which has a future and a place in Wales' future as a confident vibrant and attractive nation keen to take to place on the European and World stage.

