

Culture Committee - CC-5-01(p.2)

Date: 14th March 2001

Time: 9.00am - 12.15pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

Title: SUPPORTING THE WELSH LANGUAGE- A POSITION PAPER

Purpose

1. The Culture Committee Secretariat has requested a position paper on the Welsh language. This paper responds to that request. The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language has approved this paper.

Summary

2. This paper :

- presents some data on the current position of the language;
- summarises past public policy interventions
- outlines the role of the Welsh Language Board (Annex 1)

The State of the Language : Some Data

3. The 1991 Census recorded **500,000** Welsh-speakers (**18.5%** of the population). This was only marginally lower than the 508,000 (18.9%) recorded in 1981. (The 1991 census figure for those who said they could *either* read, write or speak Welsh was 20.1%).

4. The 1991 census results were widely seen as encouraging. They were interpreted as demonstrating a stabilisation of the language's position, after decades of decline:

Population present on Census night aged 3 and over, percentage speaking Welsh 1921-1991

Year	Percentage
1921	37.1%

1931	36.8%
1951	28.9%
1961	26.0%
1971	20.8%
1981	18.9%
1991	18.5%

5. Two other surveys since 1991 have also sought to measure numbers of Welsh speakers. These have been conducted on a sample basis, and using slightly different questions.

6. The 1992 Welsh Social Survey, using a small sample, reported that **20.4%** of the population were Welsh-speakers. The 1997 Welsh Household Interview Survey, on a much larger sample, produced a figure of **20.5%**. It is difficult to know whether this should be seen as evidence that the number of Welsh-speakers has risen during the 1990s (because of the varying survey methods). Taken together, the 1991 census and the 1992 and 1997 surveys all suggest that the proportion of Welsh-speakers is **about one-fifth of the total population**.

7. The **regional distribution** of Welsh-speakers shows the highest *proportions* in the more westerly counties (Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Anglesey were more than 50% Welsh-speaking in 1991). However, this tends to obscure the regional distribution of *absolute numbers* of speakers. For example, both Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and Denbighshire had 25,000 Welsh-speakers in 1991, and there were 32,000 Welsh-speakers in both Conwy and Swansea. The absolute numbers in Ceredigion (36,000) and on Anglesey (41,000) were not in fact so much greater. Only in Carmarthenshire (92,000) and Gwynedd (79,000) are the absolute numbers of Welsh-speakers of a much higher order.

8. The **local picture** is yet more diverse than the regional one. For example, the Cynon Valley became the last of the former Mid Glamorgan districts to become less than 10% Welsh-speaking in 1991. But at the same time numbers of Welsh-speakers in adjacent Taff-Ely and in Cardiff had risen.

9. At the local level there is continuing **contraction of Welsh-speaking communities**. In 1981, 128 of 800 wards in Wales were 70% or more Welsh-speaking and 7.1% of the population lived there. By 1991, only 87 wards out of 908 met the same definition, and only 5.1% of the population lived there.

10. The **age profile** of Welsh-speakers is particularly significant for policy analysis, and is one of the most complex areas to interpret. The 1991 census recorded significantly *fewer* Welsh-speakers in the over-45 age groups than in 1981. In the 15 to 44 age-groups there had been little change (a small rise in the 15-24 age group). In total, the number of Welsh-speakers aged 15 and over fell between 1981 and 1991 from 424,000 to 396,000 - a drop of 7%.

11. The continuing fall in the number of older speakers was counter-balanced in the 1991 Census results by dramatic **increases** in the numbers of school-aged children recorded as speaking Welsh. In 1991, 26.9% of the 10-14 age group were recorded as speaking Welsh (18.5% in 1981) as were 24.7% of children aged 5-9 (17.8% in 1981).

12. The rising number of children recorded by the 1991 census as Welsh-speaking undoubtedly reflects the **key role of the education service** in sustaining the language. The continuing growth of Welsh-medium education is part of the story. In school year 1990-91, 21.8% of primary-school pupils and 15.1% of secondary-school pupils were attending Welsh-medium or bilingual schools (these proportions have continued to rise gradually in the years since). It is likely that the teaching of Welsh as a second language is also influencing the numbers of children recorded as speaking Welsh, and that some children recorded at the census as Welsh-speaking were learning it as a second language.

13. Within the total group of Welsh-speakers, people for whom Welsh is a "**mother-tongue**" are a relatively small group, particularly in the younger generations. Primary headteachers' assessed **6.3%** of their pupils to be 'fluent home language' speakers in 1998/99 (compared to 8% twenty years ago). The 1992 Welsh Social Survey estimated that **4.6%** of children aged 5-10 spoke "more Welsh than English" at home.

Past Public Policy Interventions

14. The principal elements of the Assembly's policy inheritance in this field are:

- the Welsh Language Act 1993 which established the Welsh Language Board, and under which over 150 public bodies have so far implemented Welsh language schemes,
- the introduction of Welsh as a mandatory subject of study in the National Curriculum, following the Education Reform Act 1988
- the growth in provision of Welsh-medium and bilingual education (a responsibility of local authorities)
- the place given to Welsh in broadcasting (the responsibility of the UK Government and the broadcasting bodies)
- the provision of grants for Welsh language projects (these are now administered by the Welsh Language Board).

15. Whilst this selection naturally focuses on central government involvement with the field, it is vital not to lose sight of the concerted efforts of many other organisations and agencies which have been working for the language for many years.

THE WELSH LANGUAGE BOARD

ANNEX 1

1. The Welsh Language Board is an Assembly Sponsored Public Body established under the Welsh Language Act 1993. The current statutory Board took over from a non-statutory Welsh Language Board which had been in existence since 1988.

2. The **Members** of the Board are appointed by the Assembly. The Board can consist of up to 15 members, but the current number of members is 11. The current membership is :

Mr Rhodri Williams (Chair)

Dr Medwin Hughes (Deputy Chair)

Professor Colin Baker

Mr Jeffrey Morgan

Mr Gwyn Bartley

Ms Sue Camper

Ms Bethan Guilfoyle

Ms Gwawr Hughes

Dr Arun Midha

Ms Rhiannon Walters

Professor Colin Williams

3. Mr Rhodri Williams was appointed Chair in May 2000, following open competition. His appointment was for 3 years, to 30 April 2003. The current members have been appointed to serve a 3 year term expiring on 31 March 2003.

4. The overarching statutory **function** of the Board is "to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language". Within that broad function, the Welsh Language Act 1993 provides specifically for the Board to:

- make grants
- advise the National Assembly
- advise other organisations (which can be public, private or voluntary bodies)
- oversee and regulate the adoption and implementation of Welsh language schemes under the Act by public bodies

5. The Board also maintains a strategic overview of Welsh language education. The Board's role in relation to education is under review.

6. The Board's Chief Executive is an Accounting Officer for the public funds allocated to the Board by the Assembly. In general, the Board is responsible itself for formulating and implementing its **own policies and strategy** within the framework of the 1993 Act. Each year the Board prepares a Corporate Plan (covering its programme of activities for the next 3 years) and Operational Plan (for the next 12 months). These documents require the Assembly's approval. The Assembly has reserve powers to issue general or specific directions to the Board and, were it to do so, the Act requires the Board to comply.

7. The Welsh Language Board is one of the Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies to which **Section 28** of the Government of Wales Act 1998 applies. The Assembly has powers to transfer functions of the Board to other public bodies (or to transfer functions from some other bodies to the Board); to transfer functions of the Board to the Assembly; and to wind up the Board if all its functions have been transferred elsewhere.

8. The Board has been notable for its enthusiastic desire to build partnerships with other organisations and to work with others in the interests of the language. As the statutory body charged with supporting the language, the Board is itself an important partner with which the wider language movement can engage, both at Board member and officer level. As part of the regular cycle of monitoring the work of all sponsored bodies, a quinquennial review of the Welsh Language Board is currently underway. An interim report on the Board is due to be considered by the Culture Committee on 28 March.