

Culture Committee - CC-17-01(p.1)

Date: 15th November 2001
Time: 2.00pm-4.30pm
Venue: Newport Centre, Newport

WDA Response to the National Assembly Culture Committee's Review of the Welsh Language

The WDA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Culture Committee's review of the Welsh language. As the WDA is the lead body for economic development in Wales our response concentrates on the links between the Welsh language and economic development.

Historically some have viewed the Welsh language as a barrier to economic growth and by the same token, others have viewed economic growth and development as a danger to the future of the Welsh language. The truth is that Welsh language and culture can help improve economic growth and that economic growth can help to sustain and increase the use of the Welsh language. This review presents an opportunity to explore these synergies and in so doing to provide a way forward that will benefit all the people of Wales (through increases in prosperity) and also help to sustain and grow the Welsh Language.

The WDA is already delivering programmes which aim to deliver on a number of the measures outlined in annex c (of the consultation papers). With the assistance of Objective 1 funding the WDA, in partnership with Menter a Busnes, are providing pre-start up support for Welsh speakers to enter into enterprise, as part of the Under-Represented Entrepreneurs Programme.

Cwlwm Busnes is an innovative and proactive virtual networking facility supported by the WDA for Welsh speakers. It builds on a network of Welsh medium business clubs and a comprehensive database of Welsh businesses developed by Menter a Busnes and Antur Teifi. Independent research has shown that over 80% of new Welsh speaking entrepreneurs seek support from other businesses in their own sector and Cwlwm Busnes will enhance the opportunities for Welsh speakers to network by tackling the barriers of poor communication and lack of time.

The Enterprise Factory, funded by the WDA and European funding, is a new technique that will provide opportunities for young Welsh speakers to taste enterprise at first hand for a limited period of time. Exposure to action-learning entrepreneurship will widen the horizons of

potential Welsh entrepreneurs and increase the number that are more likely to consider and get involved in further entrepreneurial activity.

Another example of WDA activity which will impact on Welsh speaking communities is the on going work on bridging the "digital divide". To tackle this, the WDA through the Wales Information Society has been instrumental in developing a number of programmes aimed at improving access to broadband services and technologies. Significantly, the WDA has been instrumental in the Llwybr Strand 6 project. Running alongside this initiative the WDA through the Wales Information Society has commissioned an independent report looking at the availability and affordability of advanced broadband telecommunications services in Wales. The aim of the review was to identify appropriate policies that need to be taken forward for Wales to take advantage of the economic and social opportunities afforded by the knowledge economy.

On a more detailed note, the suggestion of developing a partnership of agencies with capacity for research is a sensible suggestion (Under the Research and Development theme of annex c), however the role of any potential Wales Research and Evaluation unit should also be considered in this context.

In conclusion, the WDA is fully supportive of the link between the Welsh language, culture and economic development. The latest draft WDA corporate plan outlines the supportive relationship between businesses, the people they employ and the communities they operate in and serve. Success for Wales depends on the competitiveness of people within Wales and their communities, and their contribution to our shared vision.

Gareth Hall

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