

## Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

### POLICY REVIEW OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

#### NUT CYMRU RESPONSE

NUT Cymru welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review.

It agrees with the motion endorsed by the Assembly's then Post-16 Education and Training Committee in July 2000 which stated that:

- The Committee strongly supports the aim of creating a bilingual Wales as an achievable national aim, and wishes to see the implementation of an effective strategy to ensure that this aim is achieved•.

NUT Cymru is the largest organisation for teachers and headteachers in Wales. It accepts into membership only qualified teachers (and those registered as training for qualified status). It represents well over 50% of practising teachers and headteachers in Wales across all phases of school education and in Welsh-medium, English-medium and bilingual schools. It also represents qualified teachers who may be undertaking other related posts such as education officers, educational psychologists and Directors of Education.

The Union's structure reflects the situation in Wales, with Divisions corresponding to each of the Local Authorities and an All-Wales Council giving advice to the Wales Committee, the union's Executive body for Wales. It is also the only teacher union with the complete range of full-time staff within Wales to deal with all matters affecting teachers, whether giving advice on contracts, salaries, pensions and maternity leave for individual teachers or formulating wider education policy and responding to Assembly proposals. The NUT Cymru office operates bilingually.

NUT Cymru has consistently supported the right of parents in Wales to be able to choose whether their children should be educated mainly through the medium of Welsh or of English and, whatever that choice, for all children and young people in Wales to be entitled to the acquisition of both its main languages. It has also consistently supported the Curriculum Cymreig, which gives all pupils the opportunity to learn about the cultural, environmental, historic and linguistic characteristics of Wales in all their variety. When it was proposed to introduce Welsh as a subject entitlement for all pupils aged 5 to 16 in the National Curriculum, NUT Cymru campaigned in its favour and also, just as importantly, for the provision of Welsh language courses to help teachers meet the new challenges.

NUT Cymru agrees with the themes chosen as the focus of this review:

- that people of all ages should have the opportunity to learn Welsh;
- that, thus, opportunities for studying Welsh as a second language should be improved;
- that Welsh-medium education and training across a wide range of subjects and at all levels need to be developed since, in particular in the Union's view, provision of vocational education and training and all further education through the medium of Welsh is, as yet, sparse; and
- that equal respect for both Welsh and English needs to be promoted.

Let there be no mistake about the crucial factor: this will be funding. If the Assembly is serious in its intention to create a bilingual Wales, then it must accept that there will be considerable costs involved. The richness and variety Wales could gain through achieving true bilingualism would be great, but, during the process, priorities will need to be examined very carefully indeed.

The Union welcomes ELWA's commitment to maintaining and improving Welsh-language provision within the sector for which it will be responsible. Further education and vocational training have lagged far behind schools in Welsh-medium provision. NUT Cymru has to point out, however, that, up to now, no additional funding element has been made available even to schools in Wales to provide for an additional subject in the curriculum. It is notable that, in any comparison with levels of funding for schools in England, no mention is ever made by the Assembly that this additional element (an additional language in all schools, whether it be English or Welsh) inevitably calls for additional funding.

ACCAC has done and continues to do excellent work in providing resources to meet the needs of the National Curriculum in Wales, especially producing Welsh-language materials and bilingual materials for the teaching of the Curriculum Cymreig. This is a long process and there is still a shortfall, with teachers still often having to prepare their own materials from scratch or translate and, usually, adapt materials available in English. This adds considerably to their workload. The frequent changes in certain areas of the curriculum, especially the content of examination syllabuses, exacerbates this. The WJEC does excellent work in providing Welsh-medium courses for teachers, many specifically designed to help with syllabus changes. Nevertheless, it is a sad fact, but an understandable one, that, at times, even teachers who are completely fluent in Welsh and would happily teach through the medium of Welsh, come to the conclusion that they cannot always do so because of the lack of resources available to them.

At certain phases, notably Key Stage 4, teachers often have to grapple in particular with disaffection amongst pupils. It is again a sad fact, but one that should be noted, that this is particularly true for Welsh as a Second Language at this Key Stage and gives the teachers involved added difficulties and is a disincentive for some to continue their careers.

Materials for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs is another area of worry. Again, some excellent material is now being produced in Welsh, but it is far from being enough to meet the need. Allied to this is the shortage of qualified staff, both teachers and other staff. There is, for example, an overall shortage of educational psychologists, but a particular shortage of those able to speak Welsh. Many families, therefore, feel that they and their children are disadvantaged by the fact that those formulating a statement of special educational need cannot converse with their child and with them in their first language.

There is also a shortage in some areas of LEA advisers able to offer support through the medium of Welsh. There is a shortage of inspectors who are fully fluent in Welsh. Both these further shortages hamper the delivery of Welsh-medium education.

The shortages of qualified professionals is already clear. But there remains a very significant problem. NUT Cymru would, in particular, note the current extremely serious shortage of teachers of Welsh and of other subjects through the medium of Welsh.

- The recent STRB report published in January 2002 noted that applicants to initial teacher training courses of Welsh for secondary schools for 2001-02 had, compared to the previous year alone, dropped by a massive 33%. See Table 23 as Annex 1.
- The GTC Wales survey of recruitment in secondary schools published in December 2001 confirmed very serious difficulties in recruiting teachers to teach other subjects through the medium of Welsh. See Annex 2.

Both reflect what is a crisis situation.

Although the general situation of teacher recruitment and retention (that is, for all subjects and phases) is not yet at the crisis level seen in England, it is nevertheless a growing problem with many hidden shortages already being felt. Therefore, both for improved recruitment and retention in general and for Welsh-medium teaching, urgent steps need to be taken to make teaching a more attractive career prospect. The Union has given advice on this issue many, many times in the past.

Since the Assembly took up its powers in July 1999, NUT Cymru has been warning of the impending crisis in teacher supply. By now, over 60% of teachers in Wales are aged 50 or over. Targets for recruitment to teacher training are consistently not being reached, whether by

large or small margins. Yet, within the next fifteen years, over 60% of our current teachers will retire, some sooner than others, through choice or ill-health. At the same time, there is a constant seepage of teachers of all ages (although often within the first five years of teaching) out of schools and even out of education completely into other careers.

Means of making teaching an attractive career once more must be a priority for the Assembly, else full bilingualism will never be a fact for Wales.

NUT Cymru

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