

Culture Committee - CC-3-02(p.1)

Date: 23rd January 2002

Time: 9.15am-12.45pm

Venue: Muni Arts Centre, Pontypridd

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Presentation to the National Assembly's Culture Committee – Review of the Welsh Language

Introduction

1. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is the voice of the voluntary sector in Wales. It represents the interests of voluntary organisations, community groups and volunteers in Wales. WCVA has over 800 members in direct membership and is in contact with many hundreds more through national and regional networks. WCVA represents both Welsh and Non-Welsh medium organisations, and spans organisations that range in size, interests and activities.
2. WCVA was established in the 1930's as volunteers' reaction to the problems faced by south-east Wales during the depression. Through its long-standing history of supporting voluntary and community action, WCVA has developed and matured to support many different aspects of voluntary action that includes social care, community development, the environment, health and the arts. WCVA now has 85 staff located in three offices in Wales: around 26% of them are fluent in Welsh, 3 are learning the language and another 17 will beginning to learn during the next twelve months. A staff training programme and language skills audit are currently being developed.
3. WCVA adopted its Welsh Language Scheme in 1998, undertaking to provide a bilingual service for its members and those who use its services. The Council increasingly aims to implement and promote good practice in the use of both languages in its work, activities and publications.
4. WCVA also specialises in gathering and analysing information about the voluntary sector in Wales. The research centre retains a database containing information about approximately 24,000 voluntary organisations active in Wales.
5. WCVA welcomes the opportunity to contribute towards the Culture Committee's Review of the Welsh Language. The presentation will focus on WCVA's area of work and issues relating to the voluntary sector.

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

During the last few years, WCVA has:

- Launched its project Developing the Welsh Language in the voluntary sector in 1995 with funding from the Welsh Language Board. During this period, the priority was to provide practical assistance for voluntary organisations in drawing up language schemes and recruiting Welsh-speaking volunteers.
- Produced publications which provide practical assistance, for example 'As Good as our Words – good practice guidelines for the development of the Welsh Language in the voluntary sector', which has recently been revised and republished, and 'Dancing with the Dragon – a guide to devolution in Wales for voluntary organisations'.
- In 1997, jointly launched a document entitled 'Volunteering for the Language' with the Welsh Language Board to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh Language in the voluntary sector.
- During recent years developed its role as a distributor of funding for the voluntary sector in Wales. One of the criteria of its grant schemes is to what extent applicants provide for the requirements of a bilingual society and/or users. WCVA expects to see evidence of this when drawing up monitoring reports.

The Voluntary Sector in Wales

9 Voluntary action plays a central role in our modern pluralistic society and enhances the democratic process. According to the Council's best estimates, voluntary groups in Wales number about 24,000 and approximately 90% of those are small organisations working to improve their local communities.

10. Over 80%, 1.9 million, of Wales's adults are volunteers, contributing nearly four hours a week of their voluntary time. Of these, 1.1 million are formal volunteers and 1.7 million are informal ones who help their neighbours and communities outside the formal organisations. It is estimated that the value of this voluntary work in Wales is equivalent to £3.4 billion. The sector employs nearly 20,000 workers, about half of them full-time and half part-time, the full time equivalent of more than 11,000 employees.

The role of the voluntary sector in safeguarding and promoting the Welsh language.

11. The voluntary sector in Wales has been at the forefront in pioneering work to safeguard the future of the Welsh language. Organisations such as the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Urdd Gobaith Cymru and its own Eisteddfod, Merched y Wawr, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, local language ventures, Welsh language community newspapers, Canolfan Iaith Genedlaethol Nant Gwrtheyrn, Cefn, as well as numerous local eisteddfod committees, chapels, village halls and cultural organisations have supported and promoted the language over the years. These organisations have ensured that people have an opportunity to socialise and volunteer through the medium of Welsh at grass roots level.

12. Some charities and voluntary organisations that previously carried out their activities in English only or mainly so began to recognise the value of a bilingual service provision even before the Welsh Language Act 1993. Later, organisations such as the National Federation of Women's Institutes, NSPCC Wales – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Barnados Wales and housing associations have developed projects to promote and develop the Welsh language within their organisations.

13 This kind of commitment is not necessarily demonstrated by the other organisations operating in Wales but whose headquarters are based elsewhere. Funders and organisations based outside Wales need to be more aware of the importance of bilingualism in Wales so that services in Wales or for Wales take proper account of both languages and of people's language preferences. WCVA and the Welsh Language Board intend to jointly host a reception at the Assembly or Westminster to target representatives from the voluntary sector whose organisations work in Wales but whose headquarters is located in England in order to raise awareness of the importance of working bilingually in Wales.

14. The most recent version of 'As Good as our Words' (2002) states that voluntary organisations gain numerous advantages from adopting bilingualism. It:

- Provides a better service for Welsh speakers;
- Recognises the bilingual nature of Wales;
- Promotes access to activities;
- Raises the Welsh profile of the organisation and acknowledges ownership by Welsh and non-Welsh speakers alike;
- Strengthens the organisation's appeal;
- Enables the organisation to provide effective services;
- Ensures that the organisation conforms with other linguistic and cultural legislation;

- Demonstrates good will;
- Attracts Welsh-speaking volunteers.

15. Voluntary organisations are not required to draw up language schemes under the 1993 Language Act. However, WCVA's consultation work has revealed that they are of the opinion that they should also attempt to promote the use of the Welsh language and increase their use of the language when providing services and carrying out their activities in Wales. It is essentially important that funding bodies recognise this commitment, and that core costs and project costs reflect the cost of providing a bilingual service as a norm.

16. 35 voluntary organisations have now produced their own Welsh language schemes and gained the Language Board's approval, while another 15 schemes are currently being processed. This is an example of good practice being adopted by the voluntary sector even though its organisations are not required by statute to produce language schemes.

17. The fact that voluntary organisations have not produced a language scheme for the Language Board's approval does not mean that they do not provide a bilingual service. As already mentioned, a substantial percentage (90%) are small organisations. The lack of staff and financial resources can be an obstacle to developing a Welsh language scheme, but does not necessarily prevent an organisation from operating bilingually. The Council's research in 1995 revealed that 32 (47%) organisations of the 68 consulted in the survey of Welsh language services provided by voluntary organisations followed unwritten language guidelines.

The promotion of bilingualism and maintaining a national consensus and good will

18. Many organisations that normally operate through the medium of English aim to increase their use of the Welsh language, and there exists a great deal of goodwill towards the language within the voluntary sector. Whilst they are eager to do more themselves, they have also listed the difficulties which prevent them from developing to the extent considered necessary. These organisations require:

- Access to translation services at an affordable price;
- Welsh speaking staff and volunteers;
- Access to information on good practice;
- Information on Welsh language courses;
- Access to training through the medium of Welsh;
- Resources to translate materials existing publications.

19. Black and ethnic minority organisations whose first language is neither English nor Welsh may need additional assistance to increase their use of the Welsh language in a multi-lingual context.

20. In order to improve the sector's ability to develop its use of the Welsh language, funding should be directed towards increasing access to the following:

- Training for staff and volunteers;
- Advice;
- Consultancy;
- Information;
- Production of bilingual material;
- Software and reference material

21. As well as inviting organisations to demonstrate how their activity reflects a bilingual community, specific projects require funding to enable organisations to provide more Welsh medium opportunities. Such projects should relate to specific aspects of the organisation's work – for example, volunteering or service provision – whilst encouraging a more general step change in the organisation's culture, by providing information and demonstrating how good practices can be incorporated.
22. For years, some organisations that operate mostly through the medium of Welsh have been increasing their use of English in order to reach a more inclusive audience, and have succeeded in doing so without undermining their Welsh culture in any way. For example, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin has responded to the change of attitude in south-west Wales by introducing bilingual activities in order to reach a wider audience and promote the use of the Welsh language. Such developments should be encouraged by supporting the efforts of Welsh medium organisations to organise bilingual events that will help them reach a wider audience.
23. The voluntary sector needs to have an increased opportunity to develop its use of the Welsh language at a local as well as at a national level. Unless the language is recognised as being an integral part of community development, it will cease to be a living language in the communities of Wales. For a community-led initiative to succeed, it must be inclusive of the whole community. It will therefore have to consider language choice when undertaking surveys and holding public meetings, distributing questionnaires and circulating information. This is certainly important in the field of community regeneration in economic, social, environmental and cultural terms. There is a need for funding for projects that will ensure a wide spread circulation of the appropriate resources to enable people to use the Welsh language in their communities.
24. There is anecdotal evidence that some organisations find it difficult to provide a bilingual service because of problems encountered in recruiting enough volunteers who are able to speak Welsh. This can create problems for organisations that provide certain services for example advice, counselling and personal care for first language Welsh speakers.

25. It is important to dispel the myth that Welsh speakers do not volunteer. Volunteering is an integral part of life in Welsh speaking communities, where people have traditionally helped each other. The survey work undertaken by the 'Estyn Llaw' Project in Ceredigion and the northern part of Carmarthenshire suggests that Welsh speakers tend to volunteer with organisations and groups that are seen as traditionally Welsh, for example Merched y Wawr, Young Farmers Clubs, chapels. Often this activity is not acknowledged as 'formal volunteering': this is volunteering at its most informal.

Research and development

26. More research work needs to be undertaken to determine the extent of the Welsh language and the provision of providing services bilingually on a national and local level within the voluntary sector in Wales. There is a need to examine the current provision within the voluntary sector, and to allocate funding for this purpose.

Conclusion

27. To conclude, we would like to see the Assembly, through the review:
- Commission research to look at the position of the Welsh language and the provision of bilingual services within the voluntary sector in Wales;
 - Secure adequate resources for the voluntary sector so that voluntary organisations and community groups can fulfil the potential that they have to provide a bilingual service to meet the language choice of their members and users. Voluntary organisations can reach people in every part of society. There is a need to invest in resources and expertise on a local and national level so that the sector can play a full role in achieving the Assembly's stated aim of 'creating a bilingual Wales'.