

## **Culture Committee 09-02 (p.2)**

Date: 1 May 2002

Time: 9.00 - 12.20pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly for Wales

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **Introduction**

Prof Colin Williams in his book *Language Revitalization* states that "A central question for the National Assembly is the nature of its relationship with the Welsh Language Board (WLB). To what extent, and in what ways, will/should the Assembly seek to take over the role of the Welsh Language Board? Can the functions of the Board be better realised in a different, more democratic organisational format, or is there an inherent tension in this field between legitimacy and accountability on the one hand and effectiveness on the other? Will we need a dedicated specialist body to continue the work of the Board or could it be done by a Committee of the Assembly working directly with the civil service?" Prof Williams argues against the transfer of WLB' responsibilities to the Assembly. He concludes that it would be better to strengthen the co-ordinating function of the WLB which would "militate against the severe fragmentation that has bedevilled previous efforts at language promotion".

The relationship between the Assembly and the WLB and the roles adopted by the respective bodies has been one of the central questions addressed by this review. This paper explores and summarises the evidence received on roles during the course of the review. It will look at the roles of:

- The Assembly
- The Welsh Language Board
- Local Government
- Mentrau Iaith
- Other bodies

The paper should be read in conjunction with the Chair's position paper (CC-5-02(p.2a) and the paper summarising the evidence received on language planning issues (CC-6-02(p.1)).

### **THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

The role of the Assembly, the Language Board and other public bodies in Wales in securing the future of the Welsh language was an issue in which the majority of contributors expressed views. A synopsis such as this cannot do justice to the myriad of views expressed, but we have attempted below to set out some of the main suggestions put forward on numerous occasions.

**Resources** – There were many calls for the Assembly to invest considerably more public money in the Welsh language (one group, for instance, called for direct expenditure of between £100-£200m per annum). Another respondent summed up the feelings of a good many when he said it was "...essential for the National Assembly to commit the resources that are commensurate with their stated intention of achieving their goal of establishing a bilingual nation"

**Leadership** – Another point continually reiterated was that the Assembly needed to demonstrate clear political leadership along the lines shown by the Basque and Catalan governments to their indigenous languages. The Assembly also had a valuable role to play in sending out positive messages about the use of Welsh. One contributor made the point that "the value of Welsh in the Assembly is when, where and how its use of Welsh sends positive waves to those making language choices". A local authority wanted the Assembly to "commit to running a long-term awareness raising campaign to promote the Welsh language", while the Commission for Racial Equality felt that the Assembly was "...failing to promote Wales as a distinct bilingual country which has a traditional language".

**Welsh language as a cross-cutting theme** – A recommendation put forward by a number of groups was that the Assembly should treat the language as a cross-cutting theme in the same way as it does with equal opportunities and that a Standing Committee should be established for this purpose. In conjunction with this there were calls to establish a Unit within the Assembly to monitor the development of the language and for the Welsh Language to be given cross-cutting status in the operation of the European Structural Funds, particularly in the case of Objective 1. There was also a call for the establishment of a Regional Committee based on the Welsh-speaking heartlands.

**Relocation** – A small but significant minority of respondents called for the Assembly and other agencies or public bodies in Wales to relocate their headquarters from Cardiff to the heartland areas.

**Co-ordination** – Several organisations called on the Assembly to ensure that bodies such as the Welsh Development Agency, ELWa, the Wales Tourist Board, the Arts Council of Wales, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action etc, include the aim of reviving the Welsh language in

their strategies and operational plans "so that a unified commitment is channelled in favour of creating a truly bilingual Wales". One organisation went a step further and called for the Assembly to develop permanent links with other countries and regions that had expertise in language planning.

## **THE WELSH LANGUAGE BOARD**

This review began just before the publication of the recommendations of the quinquennial review of the Welsh Language Board (carried out by Newidiem). Any discussion of the future role of the Welsh Language Board should use these recommendations as its starting point. There were 26 recommendations in all – the complete list can be found in committee paper CC-13-01(p.4) – some of the most significant are listed below:

- That the Welsh Language Board review its strategy in the light of the National Assembly's current review of its own strategy for the Welsh language and produce a revised planning document which sets out concrete targets on a five-year basis for the increased use of the Welsh language in defined sectors and identified communities.
- That the WLB invite a bottom-up contribution to policy and strategy development by involving partner organisations and key sector representatives in the development process.
- That the National Assembly's Culture Committee, in the course of its current policy review, take this opportunity to consider developing an inclusive strategy for the Welsh language which recognises the impacts of other public bodies on the language, sets out how actions in support of the language are to be co-ordinated and identifies mechanisms by which the language may be brought increasingly into the mainstream of public administration in Wales.
- That the WLB discuss with the National Assembly the degree to which it can continue to initiate and monitor public body Welsh language schemes and explore ways of devoting aspects of this monitoring process to other appropriate auditing bodies.
- That the WLB and the Assembly work closely together to develop a positive culture of support for the Welsh language in all areas of public administration and development.

Newidiem also recommended that the WLB consider how it could strengthen its regional presence in Wales. Of the few respondents who directly commented upon the WLB, several agreed that such a presence was vital to enable it to become more involved in the process of preparing local, regional and national development plans and strategies.

The development and strengthening of partnerships was also a key area identified for the WLB. One respondent commented that "the WLB cannot by itself ensure language maintenance. The Board has to encourage its partners in the public, private and voluntary

sectors and ensure that available funding is prioritised and targeted for the maximum effect of the future of the language". The funding of WLB was indeed an area that elicited some comment; several respondents took the view that the WLB's budget and resources needed to be enhanced in order for it to become fully effective.

The extent and definition of the WLB's powers was also commented upon. One respondent commented that "the Board must have its powers and responsibilities clearly defined so that it can assist bodies in the development of their Welsh Language Schemes to a greater extent".

In terms of the direct role of the WLB, respondents commented that its central role should be one of language planning and ensuring that there is compliance with the 1993 Act.

Very few respondents advocated the abolition or reconstitution of the Board although one did advocate its replacement by a "Welsh cultural and language authority".

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

There were not many direct comments about the role of local government in supporting the Welsh language, although the Committee did take oral and written evidence from many local authorities. Some local authorities such as Gwynedd, Caerphilly and RCT were praised for their efforts in promoting the language internally and ensuring that its use was unhindered. The work of Carmarthenshire CC was singled out by the Committee Chair as providing the most comprehensive framework for community-based action on the Welsh language. Amongst the measures and initiatives taken forward by Carmarthenshire CC were:

- The Welsh language as a central feature of the portfolio of a key Cabinet member
- The establishment of a network of local mentrau iaith within the county
- The instigation of a Welsh Language Development Plan which encourages departments and specific services to pro-actively engage with the Welsh-speaking public.

Several respondents put forward the use of Development Plans as being a key tool in promoting and supporting the language at county level.

On a more general note, there were comments that local authorities should adopt the objectives of the Assembly to create a bilingual Wales and to include details of this in their community strategies.

The Chair in his position paper (CC-5-02(p.2a)) also saw a particular role for local authorities in establishing the concept of Cymanfa Bro (local initiatives).

## MENTRAU IAITH

In their evaluation of Menter Cwm Gwendraeth, Prof Colin Williams and Dr Jeremy Evas concluded that "It is a little premature to assess the full impact of the "Mentrau iaith" in seeking to regenerate the Welsh language in their respective areas, but one should not underestimate their potential. To date, this is the most effective means of initiating and maintaining a regenerative strategy at the local level. "Mentrau" are likely to become the key instrument in Wales for stabilising linguistic fragmentation in areas where there is a high proportion of Welsh-speakers".

Many of the comments made during the review about the Mentrau iaith agreed on the positive impact they could have in developing the language in the community. One respondent commented that the Mentrau have "...undoubtedly had a positive impact on the community-based use made of the Welsh language and have developed a body of good practice over the years". Much was made of the potential that the Mentrau offer to increase opportunities for people to use the language and to raise the profile of the language. Mentrau iaith Cymru saw its own future as "strengthening its role and status as a national co-ordinating body....to allow it to act as an umbrella organisation able to provide support, guidance and advice at all levels. It could also develop partnerships and act strategically at a national level".

## NEW BODIES

There were many calls for new bodies to be established to support the language and the communities it serves.

Several individuals called for the Assembly to establish an independent commission to look at the crisis in Welsh speaking rural heartlands and to suggest solutions. One group suggested the establishment of an **elected statutory council** to represent the interests of Welsh speaking communities. They also called for an **Economic Development Authority** to be established specifically for Welsh-speaking communities – a call echoed by other organisations working in the economic field.

There were suggestions for a **national working party on language**, comprised of national organisations working in the language field chaired by the Welsh Language Board and funded

by the Assembly. A distinguished academic wanted to see the Assembly invest in a number of new institutions to support the language. These included a **National Standardising Centre for Terminology**, a **Centre for Language Planning**, a **National Centre for Teaching Welsh**, an **Advisory Board on Bilingualism** - to study the effect of socio-economic change including regional planning, the economy, transport, communications, media and international development - and a **Bilingual Resource Centre** to prepare software applications for businesses.

A particular proposal was put forward by Mentrau Iaith Cymru to establish a Powerhouse organisation – a National Language and Economic Development Body for Wales – to promote the economy, education and training, community development and the Welsh language. Such a body would "develop ideas, promote research and needs assessments, fund innovative schemes, stimulate entrepreneurialism, provide advice and support to local businesses, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of economic development and land use policies on the Welsh language".

In his position paper, the Committee Chair supported the concept of such a Powerhouse and envisaged such an organisation reporting directly to the Welsh Language Board who would oversee its work and act as its regulator. The Language Board would also oversee its establishment over a 5-year lead-in period, while the Mentrau Iaith would provide the organisation's Secretariat and individual components of the Powerhouse would bring their own budget to it.

## **SOME ISSUES AND QUESTIONS FOR COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION**

The Committee may wish to give some consideration to the following issues and questions:

- **The Assembly**

Does the Committee wish to make the following recommendations:

- The Assembly to take the strategic lead and set policy for the language, emphasising the role of the WLB but also the important contribution that other public bodies have to make in developing the language

- The Welsh language as a cross-cutting theme in the Assembly (including the establishment of a high level strategic unit and cross-cutting Committee within the Assembly)
- ASPBs to include positive measures on the language in their strategic and operational plans
- **The Welsh Language Board**
  - How does the Committee view the future role of the Board? Where should its priorities lie? Should the WLB be responsible for language planning as well as maintaining its regulatory role?
- **Local Government**
  - Does the Committee think that Welsh Language Development Plans are a useful tool for promoting and supporting the Welsh language at a county level? Should more authorities develop strategies of their own in the manner of Carmarthenshire CC?
- **Mentrau Iaith**
  - Does the Committee want to strengthen the role of the Mentrau?
- **New bodies**
  - What are the Committee's views on the proposed new bodies – the Powerhouse organisation and the Cymanfa Bro – put forward by the Chair in his position paper.

**Committee Secretariat April 2002**