

## **Education and Lifelong Learning Committee**

### **The Assembly's Review of the Welsh Language**

#### **Planning the future of Welsh-medium and bilingual lifelong learning**

##### **Background**

Following the publication of "The Welsh Language: A Vision and Mission for 2000-2005", which outlines targets for the development of Welsh-medium and bilingual education, the Board has been in discussion with a number of educational bodies and institutions in order to reach a consensus on the next steps as regards achieving the targets listed in that document. Thus it is timely for us to consider the needs of Welsh-medium and bilingual lifelong learning at a period when the Assembly has just been consulting on the preparatory document "The Learning Country" and is undertaking a review of the Welsh Language. The Board has already submitted for the Assembly's attention its response to "The Learning Country" and has also submitted evidence before the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on provision of school places. This focus paper should be read in conjunction with those documents, remembering that our comments are made in the context of our document "A Vision and Mission".

##### **Data**

In January 2000, the total number of places in Welsh-medium primary schools was 55,000, i.e. 18 per cent of all primary places, and almost 23 per cent of secondary schools in Wales use the Welsh language as a teaching medium for at least half their foundation subjects. At the pre-school stage, provision is available in schools and playgroups, with at least 935 Welsh-medium groups in existence in the voluntary sector. With 75% of three-year old children in Wales attending school part-time, it is clear that it is in the early years that the best opportunity is available to introduce bilingual skills to individuals for their career of lifelong learning.

The importance of linguistic continuity in statutory education and beyond must be emphasised, and it is fair to note that there is little opportunity for pupils who have received Welsh-medium/bilingual education to the age of 16 to receive further and higher education through the medium of Welsh, and provision is very uneven. With all this in mind, we must now go on to identify the planning needs of our education system, planning for a bilingual nation.

##### **Challenges**

The Assembly makes a clear statement in "The Learning Country" noting its commitment in Betterwales.com to "showing real progress towards making bilingualism the norm" and also to undertaking "a policy review of the Welsh language and its effects on education and training". With this in view, the Board wishes to submit this paper to the Assembly, but before suggestions are put forward for forward planning, they should be placed in context as regards some of the challenges faced by the Welsh language, from the standpoint of both teaching and learning:

1. Forty per cent of children who have received their primary education following the "mother-tongue track" start their secondary education as second-language Welsh speakers following an English-medium Curriculum. More continuity is needed in Welsh-medium/bilingual provision.
2. There is no linguistic continuum in our education system – there are two separate programmes, first-language Welsh and Welsh as a second language. It is no easy matter to transfer from the second language to the "mother-tongue track".
3. Welsh-medium provision in the early years depends to a great extent on *Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin*, and while pre-school classes also exist in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, provision is inadequate in all areas of Wales. For example, as regards edu-care, *MYM* provision is limited to part-time provision during the daytime.
4. There is little Welsh-medium and bilingual further and higher education provision, and there is a lack of linguistic continuity after the age of 16.
5. Children and young people with special educational needs do not always get an equal opportunity as regards Welsh-medium provision to meet their bilingual needs.
6. While the birth rate and the numbers of children in English-medium schools are falling, Welsh-medium schools are, on the whole, still growing, and there is still a demand for more schools.
7. Welsh-medium education has increased in Wales owing to the demand on the part of parents and the positive influence of a number of Local Education Authorities, and there are examples of strategic forward planning in the LEAs' Welsh Education Schemes. Despite this, Welsh-medium and bilingual education has developed *ad hoc*, and the LEAs have developed their operational policies in ways which mean that the terms describing and defining schools as regards linguistic category vary from area to area.
8. There is a shortage of Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching resources/material, particularly ITC, and there are glaring gaps in the area of post-16 education.

In addition to the above, a number of needs receive further attention in this document.

## **Pre-school Education and Developing Early Bilingualism**

Among the very young, the steps taken recently by the Assembly's Minister of Education to provide nursery education for every child on reaching three years of age, will contribute to fostering bilingual skills, on condition that this provision is available through the medium of Welsh in every community. The Early Years are crucially important as regards offering a

realistic opportunity for every child to become bilingual. To achieve this aim:

- Bilingual Early Years Centres should be set up – the Board welcomes the Assembly's aim of establishing at least one such centre in every authority by 2002. These should be set up in partnership with bodies such as *MYM* and should be operated as completely bilingual resources from the outset.
- Bilingual provision should be ensured when planning "continuing care" throughout Wales. Remembering that we are in a period of planning these developments in Wales, now is the opportunity to create a system where every child in Wales experiences Welsh-medium or bilingual continuing care provision. It should be ensured that every child has the opportunity to experience bilingual care in his or her own area or local community.
- A certain amount of Welsh-medium immersion education should be provided for every child in Wales during the early years, for varying periods according to the wishes of the parents. The Welsh sub-committee of the Early Years Panel agreed this as an aim for the future. Remembering that pupils are better able to learn languages when they are under five years of age, this is the best period to make young children bilingual because of their ability for language acquisition in the early years.
- It should be ensured that pre-school provision contributes to the process of assisting Welsh-speaking parents who have not yet passed on the language to their children.
- It should be ensured that parents who are not bilingual are informed of the advantages of bilingualism for their children.

## **The National Curriculum and Linguistic Continuity**

Pupils' bilingual ability depends on their levels of contact with the two languages, and it is thus time to create more continuity in Welsh-medium and bilingual provision, and to establish a continuum of early language learning which moves children towards complete fluency. This means moving from the current separation of first-language and second-language Welsh classes and Welsh-medium teaching. There has already been an increase as regards schools operating second-language study programmes, and the valuable contribution of *Athrawon Bro* to this process is worthy of note. However, we feel it is now time to review curriculum targets and the effectiveness of these study programmes as regards pupil achievement.

- Consideration should be given to possible new methods of raising second-language standards and of improving the educational effectiveness of the time currently spent supplying this programme in schools.
- The National Curriculum needs reviewing from the standpoint of Welsh programmes of study.
- It is now timely to ask ACCAC to review the study programmes and look at more

creative and cross-curricular methods of achieving the aim of bilingualism for the children of Wales. The Board formally requests the Assembly to conduct a review of the Welsh language in the National Curriculum, both as regards the Study Programmes and the levels of achievement for Welsh as a second language and a first language.

- New achievement targets need to be agreed – at a national level – and teachers need more guidance as regards classroom methodologies. To this end, consideration should be given to a more creative method of bilingual teaching across the curriculum.
- In order to support our schools, more support will need to be provided by each of the Education Support Services.

Ensuring a more effective transfer between primary and secondary schools is a target which no one has yet really addressed at a national level, including the educational and social contacts which support this transfer. Thus it is clear that continuity of linguistic provision and teaching medium between KS2 and KS3 is important, and the Board has already funded some bridging projects by means of its grants to assist *Athrawon Bro* in Wales. Despite this, more initiatives are needed to promote a curriculum that is Welsh in its culture and ethos, in every aspect and at every stage of education in Wales.

### **The Stage between 3 and 7 years of age**

It has long been the Board's aim to ensure a language continuum that allows access and progress when appropriate for the pupil, and one that does not impose such hard and fast boundaries between two particular study programmes. With this in view, the statutory foundation stage from 3 to 7 years of age, which integrates "Desirable Outcomes" and the National Curriculum, should be designed to give all pupils every possible opportunity to become bilingual. When considering changes to this stage:

- A less prescriptive curriculum should be created in order to give more time in the class for skills in acquiring bilingualism within a cross-curricular environment.
- The aim should be "seamless transfer" which allows every child access to completely bilingual provision across the whole curriculum as appropriate.
- There should be greater investment in training bilingual teachers, and in the agenda for continuing professional development so as to further the objective of a bilingual nation.
- The gap between first-language and second-language pupils should be reduced, thus allowing a straightforward bilingual continuum so that pupils are able to move forward according to their ability and parental/pupil choice.
- More bilingual skills should be ensured when teaching those pupils whose parents have decided to send them to English-medium schools, in order for them to achieve, at an earlier stage, the bilingual skills which better prepare them for bilingual education later on, should they decide to change from English-medium to Welsh-medium provision.

It is currently very difficult to make such a change, since the pupil who wishes to do so may not

have sufficient "early acquisition" bilingual skills – international research acknowledges the value of these skills to the child's thinking and learning processes. The Board believes that this is the logical way forward, as it would also prepare the way for similar continuity and development in pupils' skills as they move to higher education and beyond.

## **Legislation and Regulations**

In setting about improving the language continuum from the standpoint of all the subjects taught and tested/examined externally through the medium of Welsh, current education legislation makes things complicated for schools wishing to add to the number of subjects taught through the medium of Welsh. As already noted, there is no "middle ground" for the study programmes for first-language and second-language Welsh to enable a second-language pupil to make a smooth transfer to the first-language programme. This situation inhibits progress and creates frustrations.

- A language continuum urgently needs to be created in which the second-language scale moves gradually into the first-language scale.
- There should be a review of the Assembly's regulations regarding the number of subjects for which the teaching medium may be altered each year.

## **Defining schools**

The Education Act 1988 defined Welsh Schools as:

"Those where more than half of the following subjects are taught partly or wholly through the medium of Welsh -

(a) Religious Education, and

(b) the subjects other than English or Welsh which are Foundation Subjects in relation to pupils at the school."

This definition is also incorporated in the 1966 Education Act.

We know that, in Welsh Schools, Welsh is a Core Subject, like English, Mathematics and Science, and all pupils between the ages of 5 and 16 receive lessons in Welsh. In schools other than Welsh-medium schools, Welsh is taught as a foundation subject up to the age of 16. In spite of this definition, the "real" situation is unclear for several reasons:

- There are problems when defining Welsh-medium and bilingual schools owing to the large number of different categories the 22 LEAs use to define schools according to their teaching medium.

- The above definition is far from being the only one as regards Welsh and bilingual education, and bilingual schools, traditional Welsh schools and a number of other categories are to be found, including linguistic codes such as A, AB, C and so on.
- There are problems as regards the same types of schools – that is, as regards the teaching medium – being accorded different definitions and titles in different LEAs, and different percentages of the curriculum are taught through the medium of Welsh across Wales.
- There are inconsistencies and problems in the secondary sector as regards the number of subjects taught in Welsh, particularly as regards Science and Mathematics.
- It should be remembered that many schools operate as traditional bilingual schools, without being designated Welsh-medium schools for the statistical purposes of the Assembly.
- The problem of the lack of clear definitions regarding the nature of bilingual and Welsh-medium schools must be addressed before moving on to develop Welsh-medium education effectively. There has to be one set of definitions which all the LEAs can use and which both the public and educational bodies may easily understand.

As a result of the above factors, the Assembly's data does not clearly reflect bilingual education in Wales, owing to the problems of definition. Research into this, and an early decision on policy from the Assembly, are urgently needed.

## **Special Educational Needs**

In providing for children with special educational needs, everyone acknowledges that the aim is for early identification and intervention. In adapting a curriculum to satisfy pupils' needs, Wales needs the appropriate mechanisms, resources and personnel to be able to assist pupils from Welsh-speaking and bilingual families, and those whose parents wish them to receive Welsh-medium provision.

The Board recently published a report, partially funded by the Assembly, on Special Educational Needs, namely "Acknowledging Need", which suggests that its recommendations should be fed into the strategy for SEN provision in Wales. Its recommendations not only identify key areas for development, but also seek to promote more co-operation between agencies in this area of provision. In addition, the report outlines a number of examples of good practice throughout Wales.

- One of the main conclusions of the Board's SEN report is that there is a willingness, across all areas to share good practice, but very few forums/opportunities exist to facilitate the necessary processes for this. We would like to see this as a crucial co-ordinating role for the Assembly, and we welcome its declared aim of establishing a set of common data for SEN that could be used by all services.
- As regards the new SEN Code of Practice, there is an opportunity here to get rid of the

considerable disparity between authorities as regards when a pupil is deemed to need a Statement, and to establish a Code that facilitates equality of provision from a linguistic standpoint.

- We welcome the objective of establishing a completely bilingual SEN Tribunal for Wales and Educational Disability rights in Wales

## **Resources and Materials**

A situation currently exists where there are insufficient Welsh-medium teaching materials and ICT resources across our education system in Wales. Practical assistance and adequate funding must be provided for patterns of work across sectors of education and education authorities – and this must be done in a bilingual and integrated environment.

- ICT is transforming teaching and learning, and it is time to develop more bilingual/Welsh-medium ICT programmes and software. The Board feels such provision needs to be even-handed, and that the provision for Welsh-speaking pupils and students at present is far behind the ICT provision available through the medium of English.
- We support the concept of strengthening the role and use of distance learning and ICT, but in order to do this, more bilingual ICT software and resources must be developed.
- It is time to undertake a review of ACCAC's framework for commissioning materials, from the vocational standpoint as well as that of Welsh-medium and bilingual materials for schools.

## **Post-16 Education and Welsh for Adults**

The demand for Welsh for Adults provision is increasing fast. In 2001, 21,011 people registered for courses, compared to 13,330 in 1994. This increase clearly shows that Wales needs a structured national route for teaching/tutoring at every level, one that receives funding sufficient to satisfy the increasing demand. Currently, no funding has been specifically targeted towards training Welsh for Adults tutors, and this has meant a lack of adequate financial provision in a number of areas. The Board welcomes the Assembly's proposal to register more people for HE and to widen access to HE but we note the need to match the demands of Welsh-medium and bilingual HE funding with a strategy for training lecturers in bilingual methodology, and to provide them and their students, with high-quality Welsh-medium resources (based on both printed materials and ICT) and infrastructures which permit institutions to share expertise and resources.

In the field of post-16 education, we emphasise the need for more bilingual and Welsh-medium post-16 courses and vocational opportunities, more continuity as regards Welsh-medium provision in further and higher education, and more courses taught either through the medium

of Welsh or using bilingual teaching methodology. To this end, the following developments should be considered:

- Investment in Welsh-medium education and training at every level in order to create a bilingual Wales, and ensuring that provision for Welsh for Adults is central to any such investment.
- Establishing a virtual teaching centre that develops and facilitates Welsh-medium and bilingual lifelong learning. This should include provision for early-years, schools, SEN provision, FE, HE, vocational learning, community-based learning, Welsh for Adults and lifelong learning;
- A virtual centre to be run centrally by a body such as ELWa, and subsidiary regional sites being established. This could become part of the Assembly's community planning agenda and could also include vital research into Welsh-medium provision, bilingualism and Welsh for Adults. This resource could work in conjunction with the *Mentrau Iaith* (the Language Initiatives) to map the need for Welsh speakers in the workplace.
- A strengthening of all links between ELWa, providers, the University for Industry, the Welsh Digital College, the Wales General Teaching Council and other key partners.
- Marketing and increasing FE and HE Welsh-medium and bilingual provision. For example, considering that only 2,900 students registered with HE institutions in Wales in 2000 and received any teaching through the medium of Welsh, and considering that half of these had registered for teacher training courses, it is clear that Welsh-medium HE provision needs to be marketed and increased. Establishing a virtual learning centre would clearly assist this process.
- Ensuring that FFORWM and HEFCW assist governing bodies to operate good practices in all their human resources policies, including policies regarding bilingualism. A structure for continuing development is needed for teachers and lecturers, and the GEST programme may be amended to include professional development for FE lecturers, with funding being set aside for Welsh-medium/bilingual development.
- Ensuring co-operation between the two ELWa Councils under the new brand name, particularly in terms of possible work in the area of Welsh for Adults, FE and HE provision. Funding methodologies need simplifying under the new body and access must be widened.
- Devising a more strategic bilingual focus on Wales Careers initiatives, Individual Learning Accounts and Key Skills. The Information User Account, with the help of Objective One monies, could be used for provision in a number of bilingual areas, particularly for vocational provision and Welsh for Adults.

### **Teacher Training and bilingual FE/HE Teaching Methodology**

If continuing professional development is to include all our teachers and lecturers, we must provide sufficient time and funding to foster their skills. The Assembly's data shows that 28,700 teachers were working in Wales in 2001, and whilst we realize that this is 400 more than the previous year, we would repeat the point made in a number of papers

to the Welsh Office and the Assembly, that it appears that Wales has no clear method for mapping the supply and demand for Welsh-medium and bilingual teachers at every level of education. The Board's contact with Welsh-medium schools shows that they experience difficulties as regards appointing suitable teachers for a number of subjects. The following steps should be considered:

- The creation of a strategy for recruiting and training Welsh-medium teachers. The fact that the responsibility for marketing teaching as a career in Wales still appears to lie with the TTA in England does nothing to help this situation. It is clear that the methods currently employed by the Assembly's officers are inadequate for assessing the demand for Welsh-medium teachers. If the percentage of vacant posts in Wales is low, namely "0.4%", why are Welsh-medium schools, particularly at secondary level, experiencing problems?
- Encouraging more co-operation in partnership. It must be noted that Initial Teacher Training does not always include modules on bilingual teaching methodologies, and more partnership between training establishments should be encouraged in order to share expertise with this in view. This has implications for funding and for ICT.
- Developing bilingual professional development courses for the FE/HE sectors. These courses are needed by those FE/HE providers who wish to learn how to use bilingual teaching methodologies. If the Assembly's aims as regards bilingualism are to be achieved, this must be a key priority. ELWa should be involved in the planning and funding of such training.

## **Conclusion**

In consideration of the above points, the Board would like the opportunity to discuss them with the Assembly in the near future, and this within the wider context of its other strategic documents.