

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education

Presentation made by NASUWT Cymru to the National Assembly's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on March 6th 2002.

NASUWT Cymru welcomes the opportunity to address the National Assembly's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on its 'Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education'.

The Association currently serves over 13,500 members in Wales within all sectors of education. It has an increasing membership within Welsh-medium and bilingual schools and has adopted an aggressive bilingual policy in terms of the services provided to members.

The adoption of such a policy has been deliberate. To the NASUWT Welsh is a living every day working language and currently the Association distributes all relevant information to its members in Wales in a bilingual format. It is a policy unsurpassed by any other trade union in Wales but more importantly it is one that is equally appreciated by both Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh speaking members.

In welcoming the current 'Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education' being undertaken by the National Assembly the Association is acutely aware of the current predicament of the language.

1. Areas of Concern

The Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2001 published last October by the National Assembly's Statistical Directorate demonstrate a depressing picture in terms of Welsh as a First Language:

a. Primary Schools

- Of the 221,544 primary school pupils aged 5 years and over only 6.3% (13,911) speak Welsh at home,
- 9.8% (21,817) do not speak Welsh at home but can speak it fluently,
- 32.8% (72,591) speak Welsh but not fluently,

- 51.1% (113,225) cannot speak Welsh at all,
- There are 2,243 classes where Welsh is the sole or main medium of instruction and 8,705 classes where Welsh is taught as a second language
- In 1,151 of the 1,631 primary schools in Wales less than 20% of the pupils speak Welsh,
- It is only in 211 of those schools that over 80% of the pupils speak Welsh.

a. **Secondary Schools**

- Of the 186,081 secondary school pupils in year groups 7-11 84.5% (157,300) were taught Welsh as a second language.
- 14% (26,135) were taught Welsh as a first language
- Of the 35,698 pupils in Year 11 84.5% (157,300) were taught Welsh as a second language,
- 13.1% (4,688) were taught Welsh as a first language.

Of the total Year 11 cohort of 35,698 (100%) the GCSE results in terms of the percentage achieving A*-C in Welsh (1st language) within those authorities where the subject is taught in more than one school is equally depressing:

	Total	Boys	Girls
Ynys Mon	34	25	44
Gwynedd	52	45	59
Conwy	10	6	14
Denbighshire	12	10	14
Powys	7	5	8
Ceredigion	33	24	42

Pembrokeshire	7	5	8
Carmarthenshire	20	14	25
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	11	10	13
Cardiff	6	5	7
WALES	9	7	10

AREAS OF GOOD PRACTICE

NASUWT Cymru fully accepts that there are a number of developments and schemes, which can be further, developed in the interest of the language. These include:

- A commitment on behalf of both the National Assembly and the Local Authorities,
- The commitment of the Welsh Language Board,
- The work undertaken by ACCAC and the WJEC,
- The categorisation of primary schools in certain areas of Wales,
- The work carried out by Athrawon Bro,
- The support of those parents who are committed to the Welsh language,
- The commitment shown by those teachers who teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh,
- The commitment of pupils to the language especially those studying Welsh as a second language.

AREAS FOR ACTION

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- The statistics show that 113,225 (around 46%) of primary school pupils cannot speak Welsh at all. It would appear that they would be in the 5-6 year old category and would have not started any formal Welsh lessons. NASUWT Cymru deems this to be an

unacceptable situation and suggests that

- i) Welsh be either the main medium of teaching or should at least be introduced in all LEA maintained nursery schools/units,
 - ii) all such schools/units to be categorised on an A, B, C level with the appropriate level of provision provided.
- Currently there are 440 primary schools where Welsh is the sole or main medium of instruction. There are a further 87 schools where Welsh is used as a medium of teaching for part of the curriculum and 1,104 schools where Welsh is taught as a second language only.

In many parts of Wales the choice for primary school children is either a Welsh medium primary school or a school where Welsh is only taught as a second language.

NASUWT Cymru advocates that measures be taken to increase the number of schools where Welsh is used as a medium of teaching for part of the curriculum. In the first instance these schools would be targeted within the more urban areas with an enhanced provision provided for P.E, Music, Design and Technology and Art through the medium of Welsh.

- The 'Athrawon Bro' scheme funded by the National Assembly through the Welsh Language Board has proved to be very successful. NASUWT Cymru proposes a substantially increased investment in the scheme to a level where every primary school is able to access such support without recourse to its own funding.
- In some areas of Wales Language Centres often run by 'Athrawon Bro' have been successful in providing immersion courses for non-Welsh speaking migrants. It is the opinion of NASUWT Cymru that these need to be further extended.
- Wales has a dedicated band of teachers many of who have at their own expense learnt the Welsh language. These should be commended. NASUWT Cymru proposes that learning the language as well improving basic knowledge for enhanced school and classroom use should be a priority area for the General Teaching Council for Wales Professional Development Project, which is funded by the National Assembly. It is anticipated that during 2002-03 the Council will be able to fund some 1650 Professional development Bursaries, 600 Visits and Exchanges, 150 Teacher Research Scholarships, 300 Teacher Sabbaticals and 50 Professional Networks.
- There is a need to address Special Needs provision to ensure that such provision where needed is available through the medium of Welsh. NASUWT Cymru is of the opinion that the National Assembly should address the issue as a matter of urgency.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- Currently Welsh is compulsory for all pupils to the end of Key Stage 4. NASUWT Cymru poses the question of whether such a compulsion within certain areas of Wales as well as for certain categories of pupils provides good return on the investment. Will the Welsh language survive through compulsion and does the policy only serve to alienate certain youngsters thus creating strong anti-Welsh feelings?
- Research by NASUWT Cymru shows a high level of disaffection amongst those pupils studying Welsh as a second language at both KS 3 and 4. There are also examples of high staff turnover within the subject as well as the use of non-specialist teachers.
- The current 'Five-yearly Review of Standards' Report from ACCAC informs in respect of Welsh Second Language 16+ that:

'On the basis of the evidence of the examinations scrutinised there was a significant decline in the performance of candidates at grade C in every skill'.

'The standard required of candidates at grade A was constant over time in written work, declined slightly for listening and understanding, and declined in reading'.

'There was a constant decline in candidates' quality of language over the period of the review'.

NASUWT Cymru consequently poses the question of whether the substantial investment in Welsh as a Second Language within KS4 would not be better used within the nursery/primary sector? If the current policy however, is to continue then the Association is firmly of the opinion that the emphasis should be on conversational/speaking skills rather than on reading and writing.

- A problem facing many bilingual schools as illustrated in the current Estyn report is that ***'many pupils who have been taught in Welsh primary schools change to English for their secondary education'***. This is often through parental pressure and their rights to choose their children's school. NASUWT Cymru proposes the need to investigate the extent of this practice throughout Wales with the National Assembly formulating firm guidelines following such an investigation.

POST 16 EDUCATION

- Attention is drawn to various references made in the Estyn report to post 16 provision:

'Some schools are finding it difficult to go on teaching subjects in Welsh in the sixth form because there are often too few students to make it economical to run a course in Welsh'.

'In further education and work-based training progress is slow in extending Welsh and bilingual work and in meeting the bilingual needs of employers'.

'Overall, there are not enough opportunities for learners who have spoken Welsh in secondary schools to continue with their education bilingually or in Welsh'.

'In many subjects, there are no textbooks in Welsh'.

'Not enough awarding bodies and national training organisations print their syllabuses and assessment materials bilingually'.

'There are fewer opportunities for students to sit key skills tests in Welsh than in English'.

NASUWT Cymru concurs with what is a totally unacceptable state of affairs. Consequently it calls upon the National Assembly and ELWa to address the deficiencies as identified within the Estyn report and to ensure that the Welsh language is provided with equality of provision and availability within post 16 provision.

- Whilst NASUWT Cymru is encouraged by ELWa's inclusive approach to bilingualism it does have some concerns for the future of bilingual and Welsh-medium sixth form provision especially in the more rural areas of Wales. NASUWT Cymru calls upon the National Assembly to enter into a dialogue with ELWa in order to safeguard such provision.

ICT PROVISION

- NASUWT Cymru is appreciative of the National Assembly's ongoing investment in ICT. However, in order to further improve both Welsh language and Welsh medium provision it advocates:
 - i. the establishment of a National Grid for Learning for Wales which will be totally bilingual from the start. The 'Grid' should be set up in such a way that teachers will immediately feel comfortable with its content,
 - ii. the continuing expansion of broadband availability to schools and colleges which will enable schools to 'talk to each other'. The increased sharing of good practice is essential to the future of the Welsh language.
 - iii. in the same way that 'Pen i Ben' is a welcomed development for newly qualified headteachers a similar web-site should be established for both Welsh medium and bilingual schools as many currently work in isolation.

ADULT EDUCATION

In conjunction with ELWa the National Assembly needs to adopt a more aggressive approach to providing opportunities for adults to learn Welsh. Learning the language should not be perceived as a middle class, elitist pastime but as the right of every individual within Wales. To this end NASUWT Cymru calls upon:

- all those members of the National Assembly who cannot speak Welsh to lead the nation by example and sign up to an intensive course which would ensure that most debates in both committee and plenary can be conducted in Welsh within two years. The Association would also wish to congratulate all those who have taken up the challenge and are leading by example,
- the National Assembly to follow the lead of the DfES who recently announced the first ever-national curriculum for people who do not have English as their first language. A similar curriculum for the Welsh language could go a long way towards improving the basic linguistic skills of thousands of people who currently have little knowledge of the language.
- The establishment of a network of Welsh language learning centres throughout Wales based on the 'circulating schools' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and staffed by a complement of full time tutors. The original 'circulating schools' created a literate nation, which could read and write, the modern 'schools' could create a nation of Welsh speakers.

NASUWT Cymru

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