

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Bilingual Wales - Interpretation and Implications

1. Background

Resolutions concerning a bilingual Wales were passed by the Post-16 Education and Training Committee and endorsed by Plenary. These are set out below. During presentations and discussion in both the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee (ELL) and Culture Committee (CC), Members have sought clarification of what is meant by the term 'a bilingual Wales'. The purpose of this paper is to provide a definition, as a basis for discussion. It is intended that both ELL and CC would agree on a definition which would be included in the final report.

2. Assembly Resolutions

Wednesday February 16, 2000

The following resolution was passed by the Post-16 Education and Training Committee:

The Committee welcomes the Welsh Language Board's document The Welsh Language: A Vision and Mission 2000-5 as a major contribution to the task of drawing up a strategy for the continued revitalisation of the Welsh language and the creation of a bilingual Wales. [...]

The Committee notes that achieving such an ambitious task as the creation of a truly bilingual Wales must involve a co-ordinated strategy, with targets, of the kind described in the Board's document.

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.

July 4, 2000

Resolution adopted by Plenary:

The National Assembly:

1 Notes the commitment made in the 'A Better Wales' document to fostering the benefits of bilingualism.

2 Recognises the contribution that the foundation of S4C and the Welsh Language Board has made to Wales, and welcomes other positive steps that have flowed from the Welsh Language Act 1993.

3 Welcomes the further progress made for the Welsh language in the first year of devolution, which has included:

- the full implementation of national curriculum requirements for Welsh at key stage 4 in non-Welsh speaking schools;*
- the signature by the UK Government of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;*
- the increase in resources to the Welsh Language Board from the 1999-2000 budgeting round.*

4 Endorses the resolution passed by the Post-16 Education and Training Committee on 16 February.

5 Calls upon the Post-16 Education and Training Committee to allocate time in its forward work programme as soon as possible to conduct a comprehensive policy review into the Welsh language in order to form a strategy for the future; and

6 Welcomes the opportunity which will be afforded by the forthcoming quinquennial review to consider in depth the activity and operation of the Welsh Language Board.

7 Resolves to adopt policies which support the communities of Wales and which will ensure that the Welsh language flourishes in those communities.

8 Confirms its belief that the Welsh language belongs to all the people of Wales, be they Welsh speakers or non-Welsh speakers, and resolves to co-operate with public, private and voluntary organisations to maximise the opportunities for people in all parts of Wales to participate in the bilingual culture and public life of Wales; and

9 Regrets that the Department for Education and Employment is not prepared to take the necessary steps to secure the future of the London Welsh School, and calls on the Department to reconsider its decision not to fund this important and valuable school.

3. Suggested definition of a bilingual Wales

In a truly bilingual Wales both English and Welsh will flourish and will be treated as equal. The future of the Welsh language will have been safeguarded and its growth in all aspects of life will be facilitated through positive measures for its encouragement. This will entail the removal of all barriers to its acquisition and use so that all citizens will be enabled, if they so desire, to progress along a [language] continuum towards bilingual competence. These circumstances will establish a climate in which inter-generational transmission of the Welsh language would be regarded as the norm and there will be a heightened awareness of the nature and value of bilingualism and multilingualism in Wales and the world beyond.