

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

POLICY REVIEW OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION: ORAL EVIDENCE FROM UNDEB CENEDLAETHOL ATHRAWON CYMRU

1. Introduction

UCAC welcomes the fact the National Assembly is undertaking this policy review, and we are pleased to present oral evidence to reinforce the statements expressed in our written response, particularly when one recalls that the basic aims of the Union include:

- *promoting equal opportunities in education for every child and student*
- *promoting the use of the Welsh language and the interests of Welsh culture in all schools and colleges in Wales.*

UCAC is in complete agreement with the aim adopted in a full meeting of the National Assembly on 4 July 2001, namely: ". . . the aim of creating a bilingual Wales as an achievable national aim, and it wishes to see an effective strategy being put in place to ensure that is aim is achieved."

2. Welsh in the Community

The Welsh language cannot exist in a vacuum. It is vital, therefore, to look at language in education and language within the family and the community as an entity. One element cannot be considered without the other; one cannot be expected to flourish without the other being promoted and supported.

Opportunities to use the Welsh language in the community must be provided. Indeed, UCAC is of the opinion that the only way of ensuring that the Welsh language prospers is by adopting policies that will:

- promote and sustain communities in Wales
- ensuring that the Welsh language flourishes within those communities.

3. Nursery Education / Educational care

UCAC believes that there is a need to promote and market Welsh-medium schools and nursery units - especially to non Welsh-speaking parents - by ensuring that Welsh-medium nursery education is available to all within their community. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin has valuable expertise in this field, and its success should be built upon. The sooner children see and hear the Welsh language being used, the better.

Non-Welsh speaking parents who choose Welsh-medium nursery education for their children have already shown a commitment to the language, and this should be built upon by holding Welsh lessons in schools or in local centres. In this way, the whole family will learn the language at the same time.

UCAC's policy is to provide free nursery education in the community for every 3-year-old and four-year-old child - part-time education for three-year-olds and full time education for four-year-olds. This provision should be available through the medium of Welsh in every part of Wales, in the community. The ability to access Welsh medium nursery education as easily as English medium nursery education needs to be ensured.

4. Education for 5-16 year olds

UCAC believes that primary education provision needs to be looked at in each Local Education Authority in Wales. It must be ensured that these Authorities plan carefully to ensure the provision, development and progression of Welsh-medium education in all parts of their county in order to meet the increasing demand for Welsh medium education. Counties need to plan strategically beforehand, and not respond to parental pressure and campaigning over a number of years.

UCAC supports the National Curriculum for Wales, and is pleased that ACCAC is responsible for the Curriculum in Wales.

UCAC calls for the introduction of statutory SATs in Welsh as a Second Language in Key Stage 2 to ensure an equal opportunity for second language pupils. Welsh Second Language SATs in Key Stage 3 should be marked by external examiners to ensure consistency and an equal status with other core subjects.

UCAC calls for Welsh Second Language to be made a core subject in all Key Stages, including Key Stage 4. This would lead to an allocation of time equal to the other core subjects

and would raise the status of Welsh as a second language. At present, because Welsh Second Language is not a core subject, the Welsh Language is not given its due status and it is treated as an inferior subject.

In addition, there is a need to look at the range of Welsh qualifications available to 14-19 year old pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4. Specifically, UCAC calls for the introduction of an Extended GSCE in Welsh. It is the success of Welsh-medium schools that is responsible for the need to develop such a qualification, because, thanks to the National Curriculum and the commitment of Welsh teachers, a large number of pupils have succeeded in crossing the language bridge between first and second language levels. Therefore, they need a qualification such as Extended Welsh. Neither the Welsh first language programmes of study nor the Welsh second language programmes of study are appropriate for a large number of them. The pupils - a number of them who come from totally non-Welsh-speaking homes, and who only hear Welsh during their lessons - have succeeded linguistically and they ought not to be punished by being forced to follow a programme of study that is inappropriate for their needs. Indeed, UCAC supports the principle of a Welsh Language Continuum, along which pupils develop linguistically. The Assembly needs to research the best options in this field; certainly, the *status quo* is not an answer.

Whilst the situation remains one of a lack of an appropriate qualification for those pupils who succeed in crossing the language bridge, the schools of Wales will face severe problems.

All subjects should be taught through the medium of Wales in designated Welsh schools.

Traditional Welsh schools should offer a wide range of subjects through the medium of Welsh. We believe that research should be conducted into all possible methods - including sharing resources and ITC - to enable the delivery of subjects through the medium of Welsh.

Research is needed into the advantages of teaching a subject or module through the medium of Welsh in schools where Welsh is taught as a second language. This would enrich the teaching of Welsh that had been undertaken in the primary schools and would give value to the Welsh language in secondary schools, making it relevant to all pupils.

We also insist that there is a need to establish Language Centres for latecomers in every county as a means of offering them support to learn Welsh. The Language Centres that already exist in a number of counties succeed in assimilating latecomers into the education system in Wales.

It is vital also that the Assembly continues to support the Peripatetic Teacher service, that provides additional and specialist support to schools.

5. Post-16 Education

UCAC is of the opinion that Wales' sixth form units need to be safeguarded. These must be adequately funded and, in order to ensure a wide range of Welsh-medium subjects, the fullest use must be made of modern technology, including distance learning and video conferencing.

Apart from sixth form education in our schools, the opportunities for Welsh-medium post-16 education are few and far between in Wales. Indeed, in some areas in Wales, the Welsh-medium school is the only provider of post-16 Welsh-medium education. UCAC insists that co-operation should be ensured between Welsh-medium providers at a national or regional level, under ELWa's supervision, to provide and develop courses.

Provision that is Welsh-medium and of a Welsh ethos must be ensured in all educational fields post-16. Again, the Welsh language should not be limited to some subjects only. For example, because of the demand for bilingual skills, there is a need to develop relevant modules in Further Education Colleges and to acknowledge bilingual skills within the communications element of post-16 Key Skills.

Recently, emphasis has been placed on developing vocational courses. While UCAC welcomes these developments, it is essential that these new courses are available through the medium of Welsh. We must ensure that teachers and lecturers are trained before expanding any courses, or we will merely be responding to the demand in retrospect rather than preparing for it in advance. Human resources have to be available from the start to ensure that the young people of Wales who wish to receive vocational education through the medium of Welsh can do so. If we are to develop the vocational skills of young people in Wales so as to encourage them to remain in their communities, then we must have courses through the medium of Welsh in order to reinforce the Welsh language as the language of communication in our communities, particularly in our rural and Welsh-speaking communities.

6. Higher Education

UCAC believes that the higher education sector here in Wales has a responsibility to provide education through the medium of Welsh. What happens in our higher education institutions, where there is a lack of opportunity to study through the medium of Welsh, affects the primary, secondary and further education sectors. As the Welsh language provision is not adequate at university level, we have a loss of continuity which has a harmful effect on the language. There is a need to expand Welsh-medium education within our institutions, and this means long term

investment in terms of funding and infrastructure.

UCAC provided a more detailed analysis in the evidence it presented as part of the Review of Higher Education.

7. Lifelong Learning

Within the context of this review, UCAC wishes to note that there is a need to ensure bilingual education and training within community education and adult education, to ensure that Welsh language and bilingual skills penetrate into all aspects of community life.

Adequate funding is required to provide Welsh language education and training. There is a need to ensure that arrangements are in place, together with adequate funding, to market and promote Welsh-medium and bilingual vocational courses within the community, as well as within formal post-16 education, and expanding the provision for introducing bilingual skills in the workplace.

The prosperity of our Welsh communities must be guaranteed. If the Welsh speaking villages and areas die, only individuals or small groups of people will remain as language users. We must ensure that the Welsh language is a living language within our communities. In order to support the praiseworthy work undertaken by teachers in schools, pupils must regard the Welsh language as a language that is used outside the school. This would encourage them to use the language with their peers and neighbours in all aspects of their daily lives.

8. Special Educational Needs

UCAC agrees wholly with the basic principles in the proposed Educational Special Needs Code of Practice, even though there are huge training implications linked to the success of that Code. The right to receive special needs education through the medium of Welsh is vital. All organisations that help pupils and their parents must ensure that they are able to provide their services in Welsh as well as English - and that those services are of an equal quality.

UCAC acknowledges that there is a dearth of specialists in this field, generally, but that the situation is worse in terms of Welsh-medium specialists. Therefore, there will be funding and training implications, in order to ensure standard services in both languages. Consideration can be given, of course, to sharing resources and expertise across counties, e.g. Welsh-medium speech therapists could work between counties.

9. Recruitment, Training and Professional Development

It is a fact that there is a scarcity of teachers, particularly in some fields and this problem is serious in some Welsh-medium subjects. The recent report by the General Teaching Council for Wales has underlined the potential crisis that may face education in Wales. This problem must be tackled immediately, before it is too late. The problem is not yet as severe as the problem in England but it is getting worse.

The Assembly must make improving teachers' work loads a priority if it is to ensure that teaching as a career is a profession worth undertaking.

Professional Development ought to be used as an opportunity to encourage and train those teachers and lecturers who are able to speak Welsh, but who are not sufficiently confident to teach through the medium of Welsh, to transfer their medium of teaching. This would ease, somewhat, the lack of Welsh-medium teachers and lecturers.

Teaching through the medium of Welsh needs to be promoted as a professional career. Support must be given to Teacher Training Establishments to attract Welsh-medium students, including Welsh as a subject.

10. Educational Resources / Materials

The availability of adequate resources for teaching through the medium of Welsh needs to be ensured. ACCAC will have a key role to ensure a supply of Welsh-medium resources for the complete National Curriculum range. We greatly appreciate the resources commissioned by ACCAC – particularly those resources that are originally in the Welsh language and with a Welsh ethos

The translation costs of Welsh-medium syllabuses and examinations should be funded in full, this responsibility being given to the Welsh Joint Education Committee. These materials must be available at the same time as English-medium resources. We insist on parity for the Welsh language in all aspects of education in Wales.

We call upon the Assembly to ensure that a translation service is available for every school in Wales that operates through the medium of both languages.

Generally speaking, whatever is available for English-medium education should be available for Welsh-medium education - complete equality is required in terms of timing and quality.

11. Summary

A clear strategy and detailed forward planning is necessary to fulfil the demand for Welsh-medium education. In the past, too much provision was developed at random in response to immense pressure from parents. This has led to a patchy provision without a definite structure. Local Education Authorities should plan over the next ten years, working co-operatively where that would be advantageous - particularly in terms of 11-19 secondary education.

The Welsh language belongs to everyone in Wales, whether they are Welsh speakers or not, and it is vital that the Assembly commits itself to designing and adopting schemes that will promote the Welsh language to ensure a bilingual Wales.

UNDEB CENEDLAETHOL ATHRAWON CYMRU

April 2002

-----7d225af20d02a2 Content-Disposition: form-data; name="add_id_1"