

Minutes of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Date: 2 May 2002

Time: 2.00pm

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members

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| Gareth Jones, Chair | Plaid Cymru | Conwy |
| Mick Bates | Liberal Democrat | Montgomeryshire |
| Christine Chapman | Labour | Cynon Valley |
| Jane Davidson, Assembly Minister | Labour | Pontypridd |
| Jocelyn Davies | Plaid Cymru | South Wales East |
| Huw Lewis | Labour | Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney |
| Jonathan Morgan | Conservative | South Wales Central |
| Alun Pugh, Deputy Minister | Labour | Clwyd West |
| Owen John Thomas | Plaid Cymru | South Wales Central |

Apologies

Lorraine Barrett

Cynog Dafis

Janice Gregory

Helen Mary Jones

Substitutions

Christine Chapman for Lorraine Barrett

Jocelyn Davies for Cynog Dafis

Owen John Thomas for Helen Mary Jones

Committee Secretariat

Chris Reading

Clerk

Holly Pembridge

Deputy Clerk

Officials

In Attendance:

Richard Davies

Director, Department for Training and Education (DfTE)

Keith Davies

Head, Standards and Performance Division

Andrew Felton

Office of the Counsel General

In attendance:

Welsh Language Speech and Language Therapy Committee

Dr Sian Munro

Head of Speech and Language Therapy
Centre, UWIC

Rhian Huws

Speech and Language Therapist,
Ceredigion NHS Trust

Dorothi Clowes

Speech and Language Therapy Manager,
NW Wales, NHS Trust

Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin

Hywel Jones

Director

Rita Jones

Assistant Director

School Pupils

Monmouth Comprehensive School

Danielle Homer

Helen Baylis

Ben Sherwood

Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan

Jessica Roberts

Joshua Langden

Ysgol Eirias

Katie Davies

Ifan Tang

Also in attendance

Catrin Redknap

Committee's expert adviser on the Welsh Language in Education

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Declarations of Interest

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| Cynog Dafis | Registered Teacher; wife is a Registered Teacher |
| Jane Davidson | Registered Teacher; husband is a college lecturer and member of the NATFHE Executive |
| Gareth Jones | Registered Teacher; Member of Conwy County Borough Council |
| Huw Lewis | Registered Teacher |
| Mick Bates | Qualified Teacher; wife is a Head Teacher, School Inspector, member of ACCAC and Estyn committees |
| Jonathan Morgan | School Governor |
| Lorraine Barrett | School Governor |
| Alun Pugh | Wife is a college lecturer |

Chair's Opening Remarks

- The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public to the meeting and asked members if there were any new declarations of interests. There were none.

Item One: Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education – Oral Evidence – Welsh Language Speech and Language Therapy Committee (WLSLTC) and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin

Paper: ELL 08-02(p.1)

1. Dr Munro spoke to slides, highlighting issues raised in the paper.
2. Hywel Jones also highlighted the main points raised in Mudiad Ysgolion

Meithrin's paper.

3. The Chair thanked presenters for their oral presentations and then invited questions from

Members. The following issues were raised:

- There was some concern that there had been instances whereby parents had been advised by professionals not to treat their children with speech and language therapy (SLT) needs, through the medium of Welsh. Members asked how these negative attitudes could be changed. The WLSLTC said attitudes had been changing gradually, including those of speech and language therapists themselves. It was important that when training non-Welsh speaking therapists, that they were made aware of the issue of bilingualism. The area of other health professions was so broad that it would be impossible for speech and language therapists to cover all these functions/areas.
- There was some discussion concerning children's travelling times to Welsh-medium nurseries and schools. Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM) was asked if it participated in early learning partnership discussions with local education authorities (LEAs). Members asked whether there had been any complaints to the Welsh Language Board of LEAs not adhering to their proposed language schemes in terms of Welsh medium provision. MYM said that it did attend partnership meetings and sometimes there were decisions that would be overturned by LEAs. MYM worked closely with the Welsh Language Board (WLB) on this issue and drew any cases that caused concern over to its attention.
- In response to a question regarding the availability of European Union (EU) funding for Educare, MYM replied that it had drawn this matter to the attention of Assembly Members, as it appeared that these funds might not be geared to nursery provision. There was a need for crèche facilities as new businesses were being established; there was a strong case for the establishment of community nurseries, in which businesses could partake. Christine Chapman AM, Chair of the Objective One Monitoring Committee, invited MYM to write to her committee, in order for it to investigate this matter.
- Members enquired about the availability of funds for Welsh Language courses/training for nursery staff. MYM said it worked in partnership with further education (FE) colleges throughout Wales. There were courses available in every FE College in South East Wales.
- Members were interested to know if Welsh-medium provision was to be expanded, if there would be any opportunities for collaboration with the Pre-School Playgroups Association (PPA) to deliver bilingual nursery provision. MYM explained that its provision was based on immersion education. However, it had to be acknowledged that if some parents did not require full immersion, there would have to be a system whereby provision would be supplied equally through the media of English and Welsh. Training was required for teaching staff to work bilingually. MYM declared that they would be content to work alongside the PPA, as they had already worked closely on a joint initiative.
- There was some interest as to whether initiatives such as Surestart and Communities first could offer support structures to the cylchoedd meithrin centres. MYM had been involved in Surestart projects in Southeast Wales. However, there could be problems in rural areas, as the number of children attending a cylchoedd meithrin could very small. The cylch meithrin accepted children from the age of two and a half years old. If the cylchoedd meithrin were to lose its three-year-olds, the remaining children would not be enough to sustain the group.
- Members asked the WLSLTC if there had been any consideration of work-experience for pupils and indeed trainee teachers in the field of SLT. It was suggested that there might be scope to involve primary school children in such schemes. The WLSLTC explained that it was currently undertaking a

video project with Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf: it was being tested with pupils and would subsequently be distributed to all secondary schools in Wales. There was an opportunity to feed in with the Curriculum 2000 i.e. healthcare and psychology etc. but critical mass was required in order for it to work. Members asked how teaching materials could be made 'child-friendly'. The WLSLTC described how trainee teachers attended playgroups. In the second year of training, they would attend clinics and interface with tutors. In the final year, students would undertake a special needs placement. In North Wales, fifth year pupils and careers teachers would be notified and school pupils could attend an open day in training centres in two different locations.

- There was some concern that parents were choosing not have their children, who required special needs/SLT provision, educated through the medium of Welsh because they perceived that the provision was not available. The WLSLTC said that this was not a problem in North Wales as bilingual therapy was available. Although, it had been evident that managers in other regional areas had encountered problems of this kind. Overall, children needed bilingual therapy. It was emphasised that in the Rhondda region, the average SLT therapist had a very large caseload. There had also been instances where children had been placed in mainstream environments where they clearly could not cope. Again, critical mass (of therapists) was of vital importance. MYM added that the TWF scheme from the WLB was a valuable mechanism.
- Members were concerned that if the percentage of Welsh-medium population exceeded the amount of therapists available, positive discrimination might occur. The WLSLTC said that it did not believe that this would be the case – there would just be a need for more therapists. The diversification of the workforce was apparent and there was a lack of minority group, disability and male representation. If therapists were bilingual, they would obviously be able to work with monolingual people. Also, the population requiring Welsh-medium provision was dispersed throughout the whole of Wales. It was felt that the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff had been adept and focused at producing therapists for Wales. There had been the promise of a feasibility study in North Wales but this had not been fulfilled.
- One Member asked MYM to explain the potential contradiction in its paper: inviting local government to make more investment, yet at the same time asking the Assembly to instruct Local Government to implement its plans for Welsh-medium provision. MYM said that its comments on this issue had been specifically relevant to the integrated centres, which had been established with Assembly funds. There was a need for clear guidance from the Assembly.
- The Minister said she wanted evidence-based policy. She had instructed WAGSEN to make an action plan consisting of short, mid and long-term proposals. However, the Minister was concerned that during a sub-group meeting of WAGSEN, she had been informed that there would be more people taking courses to work with adults rather than with children (through the medium of Welsh). The WLSLTC said that recent graduates had tended to work with adults but this had not always been the case. They felt that there would probably be a shift towards more graduates choosing to work with children in the near future. In North Wales there had been problems in providing services for adults. Rotational posts (such as in Gwynedd and Anglesey) gave graduates the opportunity to move around and experience work in all fields. This had been based on advice from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.
- The Minister asked MYM if it believed structured learning through play was important in the development of the Welsh Language in young children. MYM agreed and said that Welsh should be

used outside the classroom and outside formal settings. Opportunities should be provided for people to use both languages easily. The components of the brain that dealt with languages overlapped in children, making it easy for them to absorb languages.

- In response to a question regarding the cost of producing standardised materials, the WLSLTC stated that it was unable to give a quote on the precise cost but the number of man-hours involved was vast. There were very few standardised assessments available through the medium of Welsh. The WLSLTC was currently in the process of costing two projects. In running this type of project, translation would be required, as would a full-time research assistant with testing experience.
- There was some interest as to whether a second speech language centre could be developed outside of Cardiff, perhaps in the North. The WLSLTC stated that it was looking to move further afield and would use as many placements as it could, using facilities such as video-conferencing. There was an urgent requirement for a feasibility study.
- One Member asked if local authorities could co-operate by forming regions. The WLSLTC stated that there was current co-operation but this ignored the shortages in some regions. MYM said that there was a need to ensure additional funding for three-year-olds in order to support Welsh-medium Special Education Needs (SEN) provision. Also, a review of playschemes would be beneficial. Both the Education Minister and the Minister for Health and Social Services supported early intervention.

Item Two: Policy Review of the Welsh Language in Education – Oral Evidence – School Pupils

2.1 The Chair welcomed pupils and teachers from the three schools. Pupils introduced themselves and the Chair then invited Members to ask questions.

2.2 The following issues were raised in discussion:

- Pupils mentioned in their introductions that they believed that compulsory Welsh at Key Stage 4 (KS4) was undesirable. Members asked, as this was a compulsory core subject, why pupils did not feel the same antipathy to other compulsory subjects such as Mathematics and English. Some pupils had held a sixth-form forum on the Welsh Language and the general response had been that subjects such as Mathematics and Science were universal languages and could be used anywhere in the world. Pupils were not learning Welsh as a first language: their first language was English. Therefore, they had no desire to ‘rebel against their mother tongue’. It was felt that there might be some pupils who did not have a natural aptitude for languages and might as a consequence feel disadvantaged. Also, some pupils thought it futile to learn Welsh, if they intended to move out of Wales to pursue higher education, find employment and/or if they lived on the Welsh/English border. Another pupil suggested that if children of nursery/primary school age were exposed to more of the Welsh Language, then it would establish familiarity at an earlier level and would pave the way for

secondary school. One other pupil believed that course content was important. The sixth-form forum had suggested that more could be taught about Welsh history and culture.

- There was some discussion concerning whether pupils were proud to express their Welsh identity through using the English Language. Pupils indicated that they were proud of expressing their Welsh identity through the English Language. Although, one pupil had encountered some negative attitudes from Welsh speakers.
- Members asked pupils to comment how best the concept of Welsh identity could be incorporated into the curriculum. There was a suggestion that the set texts for English and history lessons could be selected to reflect recent Welsh history and culture.
- Members were interested to know if pupils could understand the Chair's Welsh without the use of simultaneous translation. All pupils replied that they could not. Pupils felt that in learning Welsh as a second language, they were taught just enough to cover the set syllabus and pass their examination.
- Pupils were asked if their teachers were enthusiastic about teaching Welsh. Pupils responded that generally their teachers were enthusiastic in their teaching of Welsh as a second language. However, they sometimes had classes of approximately 30 pupils and it was difficult for teachers to give pupils individual attention.
- There was more discussion regarding study of Welsh culture and Members inquired how pupils envisaged this could be taught. One pupil thought that the name 'Welsh lessons' was outdated and redundant. There was not necessarily a need to teach through the medium of Welsh but general vocabulary could be introduced. Currently, pupils were given a weighty amount of vocabulary, very little grammatical instruction and were unable to hold basic conversations.
- In response to a question concerning the association of specific jobs with the Welsh Language, pupils replied that they associated teaching, media and public sector posts with the Welsh Language. However, it was felt that this was based on perceived attitudes rather than on hard evidence. Pupils stated that because nearly everybody in Wales could converse through the medium of English, Welsh was perceived as language that did not need to be used.
- The Chair asked pupils if they had felt let down by the education system, in respect of the teaching of Welsh Language and their subsequent lack of opportunities to effectively use the language. The Chair asked if pupils still wished to learn Welsh. All pupils indicated that they wished to be able to speak Welsh. One pupil intended to learn Welsh after leaving school.
- The Minister acknowledged the pupils' desire to learn more about Welsh culture but stated that perhaps schools in Wales were not exploiting the potential of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig. Estyn had also acknowledged this in their recent evidence to the Committee. The Minister commented that perhaps the Welsh as a second language course structure and content needed reviewing. The Minister asked pupils if they would appreciate the value of learning Welsh if the course was revised. The pupils indicated that they wanted to be able to hold basic conversations. They felt that it would be helpful to use Welsh as a medium for teaching other subjects.
- The Minister also asked pupils what their opinions were on developing Welsh-medium opportunities (immersion) within English-medium primary schools. Pupils had mixed responses: some thought it

might cause segregation, yet it would be beneficial to have opportunities/choices. Others felt it might cause problems if parents and their children wanted different provision.

- Members were interested to know if pupils thought there was a perception that they would be disadvantaged in the employment market in Wales, if they did not speak Welsh. Also, pupils were asked to comment on the Welsh Language developing for the future and the possibility of it being used in areas other than education, for example – in business. One pupil described how Japanese had become the international language of business and industry and doubted whether many enterprises based in Wales acknowledged the importance/relevance of the Welsh Language. Another pupil said they wished to stay in Wales and learn Welsh. It was generally felt that if Welsh was spoken more widely, then young people might appreciate the worth and relevance of the Welsh Language.
- One Member raised the issue of tokenism and inquired if Welsh was taught in a different manner, whether attitudes would change. A couple of pupils thought that the current Welsh course in schools trivialised and degraded the Welsh Language and had made it appear inferior to the English Language.
- Pupils were invited to comment on their perception of teaching of modern foreign languages. Pupils told members that Welsh could not be compared with modern foreign languages. It was important that people wanted to learn languages – otherwise this could lower students' examination grades.
- One Member reiterated the suggestion (that had been made earlier in the review) of educating every child of nursery age through the medium of Welsh. There was some interest as to how pupils would feel about this approach if they became parents. One pupil felt that the proposal appeared insular: if Welsh were to be developed on such an enormous scale, the English speakers might feel excluded and alienated.
- There was some discussion as to how schools should be structured: segregated monolingual schools and/or bilingual schools. Pupils had mixed feelings: some preferred separate monoglot English and Welsh-medium schools, whilst others felt that bilingual schools were more beneficial.

2.3 The Chair thanked the pupils for attending and congratulated them on their honesty and openness. The Committee endorsed the Chair's remarks. The Chair stressed the importance of implementing a strategy that made the teaching and study of the Welsh Language, a pleasurable experience.

Item Three: Minutes of 24 April 2002 meeting

Paper: ELL 07-02(mins)

3.1 The Committee ratified the minutes as a true record of the last meeting.

Committee Secretariat May 2002