



Ein cyf/Our ref MA/P/6488/16

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Chair
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales

29 November 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to come before the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee on 2 November to discuss our allocations for the Welsh language in the context of the Welsh Government draft budget. I have responded to your requests for further information following the headings set out in your letter.

Bilingual Champions

One of the aims of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy is to ensure linguistic continuity from statutory education into further education and higher education. The aim of the Bilingual Champions project was to support further education colleges to establish an infrastructure to increase their Welsh-medium and bilingual provision ensuring that young people continue to use and develop their language skills. All further education colleges received the grant for three academic years as part of a rolling programme, to employ a dedicated officer to plan provision and to hold activities to develop the students' Welsh language skills. The grant to the last four colleges joining the project will end during 2016-17.

In September 2014 *A study of the work of the Bilingual Champions in Further Education* (<http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2014/140925-welsh-medium-education-strategy-bilingual-champions-en.pdf>) was published under the auspices of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy evaluation. Based on the evidence collated, the Bilingual Champions work "has led to a clear increase in the attention given to the planning of Welsh-medium provision. This increase would not, in all likelihood, have been seen if it were not for the existence of the Champions."

An increase was seen in the data demonstrating that students selecting Welsh-medium and bilingual courses has risen over a period of five years from 6.2% in 2009/10 to 7.2% in 2014/15.

Although the project comes to an end during 2016-17, every further education college has continued with the role of the Bilingual Champion, either as a single post, or by distributing the responsibilities between one or more college staff. As a result of Welsh Government investment, the colleges have the support to implement their plans to increase Welsh-medium curriculum provision, as well as providing young people with opportunities to use their Welsh language skills.

We will continue to support further education colleges through the Welsh-medium Allowance provided to colleges as part of their annual revenue settlement. Colleges are expected to use the allowance to develop provision to enable learners to continue with their post-16 education through the medium of Welsh. In addition, we support the colleges through the Sabbatical Scheme (providing Welsh language training to lecturers) and through our agreement with Sgiliaith (providing practical support and training to develop Welsh-medium and bilingual provision).

In the draft Welsh Language Strategy we have clearly indicated that we wish to ensure that following Welsh-medium courses in further and higher education is a completely natural choice. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has established a task and finish group to review the activities of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and to make recommendations on the way forward, taking into account extending the role of the Coleg to include further education. We will therefore await the group's report before making decisions on providing further support.

Agency for the Promotion of Welsh

I noted in the meeting on 2 November that several decisions would need to be made in this field, such as the structure and function of the new agency. Clearly, it is vital that all these matters are thoroughly considered to ensure value for money and to ensure the best possible outcomes from this new investment to promote the Welsh language. Given that, I am mindful that we need to take our time in allocating this funding to ensure the greatest possible impact. I will, of course, write to the Committee with more information as soon as the decisions have been made.

Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment

While the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment focuses on high-level strategic impacts of spending decisions, throughout the budget planning process, impact assessments are undertaken in line with this Government's approach in all areas. Impact assessments of portfolio spending plans are being covered through subject committees' scrutiny of budgets.

Welsh in Education BEL

As I noted in my evidence paper, through the budget agreement with Plaid Cymru, the £5m of new money will be invested in further developing Welsh for Adults via the already established National Centre for Learning Welsh (Welsh in the workplace courses in particular), and the remainder will be invested in promoting the Welsh language.

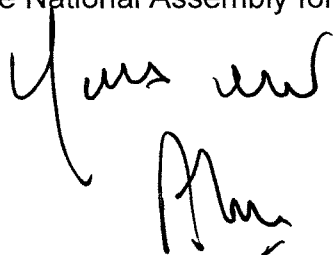
As is noted above, there are decisions to be made concerning the new agency which will promote the Welsh language. I am unable to confirm how much of the money will be used to promote the Welsh language on the ground in Wales until those decisions have been made. I will, of course, aim to ensure the best possible outcomes and ensure that as much of the money as possible is spent on promoting the language across the length and breadth of Wales.

Welsh Language Commissioner's Budget

From your letter, I understand that there is uncertainty surrounding the Welsh Language Commissioner's budget in the current financial year and in 2017-18. As the Committee is aware, the First Minister agreed to provide one-off additional funding of £150,000 to the Commissioner in the 2015-16 financial year following a request from the Commissioner for additional funding. Since then, I have not received any request for additional funding from the Commissioner for this financial year (2016-17).

In looking at the allocations in the draft budget for 2017-18, there has been no cut to the Commissioner's budget when compared with the 2016-17 First Supplementary Budget levels. I can confirm I received the Commissioner's budget estimates for the 2017-18 financial year at the beginning of October in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. As was noted by the Commissioner's office in their message to the Committee, the estimates request an increase in the budget in 2017-18 and 2018-19 when compared with the current budget.

We are currently examining the Commissioner's estimates. I will lay the estimates before the National Assembly for Wales as usual following the procedure set out in the Measure.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun Davies', with a long vertical line extending downwards from the first letter.

Alun Davies AC/AM

Gweinidog y Gymraeg a Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language

