

# WRITTEN EVIDENCE PAPER TO THE CULTURE, COMMUNICATIONS, WELSH LANGUAGE, SPORT AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

## Minister for Education and Welsh Language

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### Introduction

This paper provides evidence in advance of my appearance before the Committee on 29 September 2021. The invitation asked for information on the following areas:

- i. Spending and support for organisations to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic;*
- ii. An assessment on how the pandemic has affected the Cymraeg 2050 targets, and action taken to minimise its impact;*
- iii. Your priorities for supporting and promoting the Welsh language for the duration of the Sixth Senedd;*
- iv. Your timetable for the introduction of further Welsh Language Standards Regulations and any additional proposed legislation.*

The response below focuses on each of these issues in turn.

## Background

In July this year, we published the [\*Cymraeg 2050 Work Programme for 2021-26\*](#) outlining the work to continue to implement *Cymraeg 2050* during the Sixth Senedd. By publishing the Work Programme early in this Government's term, we are maintaining the momentum that has grown since launching *Cymraeg 2050* in 2017 and clearly stating our intentions for the next five years.

*Cymraeg 2050* is a strategy that spans a long period, therefore we knew that changes in society could mean having to adapt our priorities over time. Of course, we have had to do so earlier than expected due to the pandemic, and the new Work Programme reflects this as we continue the journey to double the daily use of Welsh, and towards achieving a million speakers.

### **i. *Spending and support for organisations to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic***

In order to implement *Cymraeg 2050*, we are working across Government and beyond. The third sector organisations funded through the grant to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh<sup>1</sup> have an important role to play, along with Mudiad Meithrin, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, the National Centre for Learning Welsh, the Welsh Language Commissioner and others.

Throughout the pandemic, we have maintained close contact with our partners by communicating openly and clearly with them, by providing advice and support, and by co-operating and co-planning. We will continue to maintain this close contact into the future.

It is fair to say that COVID-19 has presented our partners with a number of challenges in implementing *Cymraeg 2050*, but I have been greatly impressed by the way in which they have responded over the last year and a half – not only in order to survive, but often in successfully diversifying too. I am confident that much of this new and innovative work will become part of our new practices in the future.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, despite the difficult financial position, we have managed to allocate additional funding to support our partners when possible, e.g. £1.3m in 2020-21 to support the Urdd following its loss of income and redundancies.<sup>2</sup>

During this financial year, we have managed to earmark an additional £2.4m to deliver Welsh language policy from the COVID-19 Response Reserve, as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The organisations are: the Urdd, the National Eisteddfod, the Welsh language initiatives (mentrau iaith), Merched y Wawr, Young Farmers, Cymdeithas Eisteddfodau Cymru, local Welsh language newspapers (papurau bro) and Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru (the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters).

<sup>2</sup> My predecessor presented the previous committee with an evidence paper in January this year detailing the additional funding allocated since the emergence of COVID-19.

- **Late immersion provision**

The new *Cymraeg 2050* Work Programme includes all-important targets for children in Welsh-medium education, including 26% of year 1 learners to be educated through the medium of Welsh by 2026. The most recent figure (for 2020/21) is 23%.

Late immersion provision is an essential part of the jigsaw and demand for this provision, or the need to incorporate immersion teaching methodologies into mainstream schooling, has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Anecdotal evidence at local level seems to suggest that more families are relocating to Wales from across the border, leading to a rapid increase in demand for late language immersion provision.

During this financial year, additional funding of £2.2m has been allocated from the COVID-19 Response Reserve to support late immersion provision across all 22 local authorities in Wales. This funding will allow LAs to safeguard existing late immersion provision (language units in schools or standalone centres) and expand in areas where there is currently limited provision. Funding will also allow immersion centres to support rapid re-immersion in Welsh language skills amongst all learners following an extended period with no or limited contact with the Welsh language as a result of consecutive lockdowns.

- **The National Eisteddfod**

During this financial year, additional funding of £0.2m has been allocated from the COVID-19 Response Reserve to support the National Eisteddfod. The Eisteddfod is an iconic Welsh language cultural event that not only celebrates our unique Welsh culture but also embraces diversity within Wales. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 and 2021 Eisteddfodau were postponed. As a consequence, the Eisteddfod has faced financial challenges – with no income generation opportunities available (as well as having to pay contractual costs of cancelling the 2020 Eisteddfod and the need to pay core running costs). This in turn meant that the Eisteddfod had to undertake a compulsory redundancy process to reduce their staffing levels from 12 to 6 members of staff.

The additional funding secured will support the Eisteddfod to rebuild and ensure they have the necessary resources to plan the 2022 and 2023 National Eisteddfodau. Funding will also support a community and social inclusion pilot project: the 2022 and 2023 National Eisteddfodau will be held in Ceredigion and on the Llŷn Peninsula, respectively – areas that have seen relatively high levels of inward migration and high demand for second homes.

We will continue to co-operate closely with our partners in order to move forward together towards a million Welsh speakers.

ii. [\*An assessment on how the pandemic has affected the Cymraeg 2050 targets, and action taken to minimise its impact\*](#)

*Cymraeg 2050* stated that our plans for delivering the strategy would need to be adapted over time in response to changes in society. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that many of our interventions and those of our partners have had to change or cease, and new interventions have had to be created. Naturally, our response to COVID-19 and its impact on the use of Welsh is central to our new Work Programme, and the main elements of the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy are clear and remain despite the pandemic.

However, we do not yet know what all the implications of the pandemic will be on meeting the *Cymraeg 2050* targets. The Office of National Statistics is expected to publish all Census findings, including Welsh language data, between spring 2022 and spring 2023. In response to this, we will continually review the targets and related [trajectory](#), and adapt our work programmes accordingly.

But despite the pandemic, we have managed to reach a number of targets that were set in the first *Cymraeg 2050* work programme (2017-21):

- One of our key targets is to expand Welsh-medium provision in the early years as an access point for Welsh-medium education. To achieve this, we set a target to open 40 new groups by 2021. Over the past 3 years, we have funded Mudiad Meithrin to lead on this expansion through their *Set up and Succeed (Sefydlu a Symud)* programme. In spite of the pandemic, we have achieved this target: 43 new groups have been opened as of this month (September 2021). Another 12 groups are planned for this current financial year.
- There were also encouraging transition rates between pre-school and Welsh-medium primary education (from 86.4% in 2015/16 to 88.1% in 2019/20).
- The percentage of Year 2 children (usually 7 year olds) assessed through Welsh as a first language increased by just under 1 percentage point (from 22.0% in 2015/16 to 22.8% in 2020/21). Although the target of 24% by 2021 has not been met, there are encouraging signs in younger cohorts, where 23.8% of Reception class children (usually 5 year olds) were taught in Welsh in 2020/21<sup>3</sup>.
- In section (i) of this paper, we refer to additional funding for immersion provision – this will support our work to reach this target. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools capital projects will also be central in our efforts. The first round of Welsh-medium capital funding during 2018 supports 46 projects across 20 local authorities, that will lead to 2,818 Welsh-medium childcare and education places. The pandemic has impacted this work to some extent as the completion dates for some projects were pushed forward until later in 2022. But most of the 46 projects are progressing well, with 8 already completed (e.g. the Cwm Gwendraeth Welsh Language Centre, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Evan James, and Ysgol y Wern) and over £16.1m has been claimed to date. Applications for the second share of the Welsh-medium capital investment will be submitted by 22 October 2021.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that teacher assessment data was not collected during 2020/21, therefore the data is based on Pupil Level Annual School Census data for 2020/21.

- We had to adapt the timescale for submitting the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) following COVID-19. Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019 set a timescale for local authorities to submit their first ten year plans for approval by January 2021, and for the plans to be implemented from September 2021. This timescale was not found to be practical in the light of the pandemic, and so the commencement date for the next WESP round was moved from 1 September 2021 to September 2022<sup>4</sup> – the current WESPs will be extended until the new plans come into force at that time. However, remote working has presented us with new opportunities to support local authorities. We held 10 virtual sessions (some in Welsh, others in English) with local authority officers and members of Local Education Fora, to support them in preparing their WESPs. 170 officials attended the live sessions, and many more have listened on-line since. The feedback has been notably positive which has led us to arranging further sessions for the autumn term.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been working across the Government and with our partners all over the country to respond to a rapidly changing situation, seeking to mitigate any negative impacts on *Cymraeg 2050* and seeking to maximise opportunities that come our way. This has varied from offering additional funding to some grant partners to support them as events were postponed and funding streams disappeared overnight, to ensuring Cysgliad is available free of charge (it has been downloaded by more than 7,000 individuals), holding a campaign to support parents whose children are in Welsh-medium education, and holding an audit of community language use.

In December 2020, we published the result of that audit in the form of a Government Social Research Report, under the title [The effects of COVID-19 on Welsh language community groups: survey results](#). This report analysed the activity of Welsh language community groups in light of COVID-19. The development of the report was guided by a Welsh Language Partnership Council sub-group.

In July 2021, we published our [response to the report](#). Here are some of the general themes of the response:

- Recognising and encouraging the concept of monolingual Welsh language spaces will be central to our work – creating spaces in which we can freely use our Welsh without barriers.
- A community empowerment model will be central to our work – as well as the work we fund.
- We will reach out beyond organisations we fund and beyond Welsh language organisations in order to encourage more people to take action to support our language. And we will expect the organisations we fund to do the same.

We will further discuss some aspects of our response under the heading below.

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<sup>4</sup> This was done through the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020.

On 14 September, the initial results of the 2019-20 Language Use Survey were published, in [Welsh language use in Wales, 2019-20](#). The survey is used to measure progress against our target of doubling the daily use of Welsh, which is also one of our national indicators in relation to the Welsh language. The survey stated that 10% of people aged three or older spoke Welsh daily and could speak more than just a few words of Welsh. This is the same percentage as in the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15. It is important to note, however, that the survey came to an end prematurely in March 2020 because of the pandemic, and so it is not yet clear what the impact of COVID-19 will be on the daily use of Welsh in terms of the language use survey.

iii. [\*\*Your priorities for supporting and promoting the Welsh language for the duration of the Sixth Senedd\*\*](#)

As Minister for the Welsh Language, supporting Welsh speakers to use our language – promoting the *use* of Welsh – is the core purpose of a large part of my role. This paper in its entirety therefore addresses the supporting and promoting of the Welsh language. Below are details of some relevant aspects of our work that have not been previously discussed (this is not a comprehensive list):

- It is our aim to revise our **Grant** Scheme to Promote the Welsh Language in order to see how we can further increase the use of Welsh.
- We will look at our **business sector** activity to see how that work could be evolved, developed and adapted in order to contribute to increasing the number of businesses / co-operative companies and / or community companies operating in Welsh.
- We will continue to implement our [Welsh Language Technology Action Plan](#), focusing immediately on creating systems that will use **technology** to aid the work of translators. We will aim to create a ‘zone-specific’ system for medical translations in the first instance.
- Also in the technology field, we will work with **procurement systems** in order to make it easy for software developers (and commissioners) to develop software that provides the best experience for Welsh language users. Our aim in this is to increase the numbers using Welsh language technology, which will of course contribute to our target of doubling the daily use of Welsh.
- We will implement our [National Policy on Welsh Language Transmission and Use in Families](#) in order to help **parents** to use their Welsh with their children. In the first place, we will look at work in areas unrelated to the Welsh language that use behavioural sciences to work with parents. This will feed into future interventions stemming from the policy.
- We will use the responses to the [recent consultation](#) on the **linguistic infrastructure** of the Welsh language to develop a final policy that will set out how we will make it easier for people to use resources such as dictionaries, terminology databases and Welsh language corpora. An effective linguistic infrastructure is essential to help people procure and use the language.

The following are also included in the [Programme for Government](#) of our Sixth Senedd, and therefore form an important part of our priorities:

- Legislate to strengthen and increase our Welsh language education provision (through a **Welsh Medium Education Bill** – see section (iv) of this paper).
- Address the high numbers of second homes in some of our communities. We are currently developing a **Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan** to be published in the autumn – we will hold a consultation on its content. Our aim is to secure opportunities for Welsh language communities to thrive, and to make it possible for young people to remain or return to those communities.
- Expand the role of the **Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol** – we have allocated an additional £0.810m to the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol during this financial year to support strategic projects across all further education colleges, that will develop teaching capacity in Health and Social Care; Childcare and Public Services – priority areas highlighted in the [Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan](#).
- Expand our Welsh language **early years** provision.
- Provide free access to the **Urdd Eisteddfod** in 2022.
- Introduce a pilot project which will incentivise young Welsh speakers to **return from universities** to help teach Welsh in schools.
- Take steps to protect Welsh **place names**.

iv. [\*\*Your timetable for the introduction of further Welsh Language Standards Regulations and any additional proposed legislation\*\*](#)

Increasing the use of Welsh is a priority for us – indeed, doubling the daily use of Welsh is one of *Cymraeg 2050*'s two main aims. In order to set the direction of the Welsh language standards programme for the future, we want to understand exactly how the standards already set are helping Welsh speakers to use our language more often. The general picture formed on the basis of that understanding will help us to decide how best to use the standards system to contribute to increasing the use of our language in future. We have begun to discuss this with the Welsh Language Commissioner, and those discussions are ongoing.

We have made a commitment in the Programme for Government to bring forward a Welsh Medium Education Bill this Term. The purpose of the Bill will be to strengthen and increase the provision of Welsh-medium education across Wales in order to meet our targets in *Cymraeg 2050*.

We have already taken important steps in this area. We have strengthened the subordinate legislation that supports the planning of Welsh-medium education by local authorities through their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, and have consulted on non-statutory guidance in relation to Welsh-medium provision. I am eager to explore what more we can do in this field in order to make Welsh-medium education more accessible and fair.

We have also committed in the Programme for Government and in the *Cymraeg 2050* Work Programme for 2021-26 to give Transport for Wales new powers to better integrate rail, bus and active travel and regulate them in order to meet the Welsh Language Standards.

**Jeremy Miles MS**

**Minister for Education and Welsh Language**