

Overview

- i. Cardiff University is an ambitious and innovative university with a bold and strategic vision. We provide an educationally outstanding experience for our students. Driven by creativity and curiosity, we strive to fulfil our social, cultural, and economic obligations to Cardiff, Wales, the UK, and wider world.
- ii. Given the remit of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee, we are recommending priorities that relate to the Welsh language. We believe the committee should prioritise:
 - Pathway(s) between pre- and post-16 bilingual education.
 - Recovery and development of in-person community Welsh-language activities and wider networks, including legislation and policy to conserve majority Welsh-language communities.
- iii. The University's work covers a range of ministerial portfolios and committee responsibilities. Accordingly, we will also be suggesting that the:
 - Children, Young People and Education Committee prioritise Wales's response to England's reforms of higher education.
 - Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee prioritise research and innovation funding in Wales.
 - Health and Social Committee prioritise the expansion of medical education and research within Wales.

We would be happy to provide those submissions as supplementary evidence to the Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee.

1. What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your sector, and what further support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments both to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable the post-pandemic recovery?

- 1.1 There is a good deal of anecdotal evidence that the Welsh-language education sector has faced significant challenges owing to COVID-19. These have perhaps been most keenly felt at primary school level, where non-Welsh-speaking parents have struggled with the challenges of home schooling, but we must be alive to similar dynamics emerging in higher education (HE).¹
- 1.2 There are indications that the circumstances have created challenges at the crucial juncture when students arrive at university. Many starters will have diminished confidence owing to the lack of opportunity in the past two years to speak the language, whilst staff are more restricted in terms of 'in-person' access to freshers – this is when both formal and informal discussion can be crucial in reassuring students and outlining the opportunities and support they will receive.
- 1.3 This is potentially a particular issue in terms of widening participation, as it is often those from less privileged backgrounds and/or those who do not come from a household where Welsh is spoken who need persuading to engage with Welsh-medium provision. Consideration needs to be given to extra-curricular support that targets these groups and reinforces positive messages through schools, further education colleges and universities

¹ Children, Young People and Education Committee. 2021. [The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people: Final report](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.

about bilingual education in HE and the opportunities it affords. Thought should also be given to how university staff and students could be supported by language specialists who can help students with developing their language skills at this more advanced and specialised level.

- 1.4 Another major consideration for Welsh-medium learning at university level is the lack of bespoke online resources that enable quality online/blended teaching and learning. The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol has carried out very important work in key subjects to address this challenge but there is broad scope for further projects. It should be recognised in this context that English-language modules can be supported by YouTube and other platforms that offer a rich portfolio of resources; except for Hansh, there is very little in terms of Welsh equivalents.
- 1.5 With respect to academic research, consideration needs to be given to how Welsh-language research has been impacted over the last two academic sessions, together with research relating to Welsh and other minority/vulnerable languages. There is a need to ensure that such work can be 'recovered'. In the context of UNESCO's Decade of Indigenous Languages, as well as the impact of COVID-related deaths on vulnerable language groups that have deepened the global language crisis, there is a golden opportunity for Wales to locate itself at the forefront of language revitalization on an international stage.²
- 1.6 More generally, the negative impact of the pandemic on Welsh-language communities should be borne in mind.³ It is probable the pandemic will have impacted on the experience of post-16 pupils who in addition to more limited use of Welsh in an educational setting will have had more limited opportunities to use their Welsh in communal, in-person activities, which again may well have impacted their confidence. The measures noted above would be relevant to such concerns. This same impact will have been experienced by Welsh speakers of all ages and consideration needs to be given to the linguistic health and diversity of communities where Welsh speakers represent both the majority and the minority. Mitigation targeted at particular social activities that are often conducted through Welsh is needed as part of recovering and strengthening Welsh-language networks.

2. What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term?

- 2.1 There are broadly five issues we recommend for prioritisation:
 - Working with universities to engage and inform sixth form and university students on the possibilities and benefits of bilingual HE.
 - Investment in the creation of bespoke online content that can be used to enrich blended learning during the pandemic and beyond.
 - Supporting the recovery and development of in-person community Welsh-language activity and wider networks.
 - Legislation and policy to conserve majority Welsh-language communities.

² UNESCO. 2021. [UNESCO launches the Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages](#). Paris: UNESCO.

³ Walters, L. et al. 2020. [The effects of Covid-19 on Welsh language community groups – survey findings](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

- Working with universities to strategize around world-leading research and activity regarding the global language crisis and UNESCO's Decade of Indigenous Languages (with a view to the deep links with the climate crisis).

3. How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you or your organisation? What support have you received to respond to the changes? What further support, if any, is needed from Welsh and UK Governments?

- 3.1 There is no doubt from the perspective of a minoritized language such as Welsh that the EU provided a positive geopolitical environment for the support and protection of the language, not only with respect to monies that supported many of the most vulnerable Welsh-language communities through structural funding, but also through creating a positive political discourse where issues around language erosion could be discussed in a sympathetic and meaningful manner.⁴ While in most respects it is too early to tell how the new situation will impact the Welsh language, thought needs to be given to how these material, ideological and legislative changes are affecting wider society.
- 3.2 Many of the concerns outlined above regarding the pandemic's impact on majority Welsh-language communities hold in this context. Of major concern also is Brexit's effects on a rural Welsh economy (and culture) that is in many cases the lifeblood of Welsh as a community language.⁵ This point has been raised by the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Farmers' Union of Wales.⁶ While those effects may not be felt for some time in the university sector, the resulting language decline will impact HE's ability to produce a bilingual workforce and to support Welsh-language academic research and innovation. Again, effective and thoughtful policy and legislation are required.
- 3.3 On a more positive note, consideration should be given to how Brexit may influence the prevailing attitude towards modern languages, and therefore towards bilingualism and multilingualism more generally. In view of the UK's declining influence in the EU and the potential turn away from English as a *lingua franca*, modern languages will be more important than ever. In this context, the advantages of a Welsh-language education in terms of competence in learning other languages is a consideration, as is a more tolerant and constructive attitude towards language learning and languages more generally. Government at all levels should be considering these long-term issues and how to adjust policy accordingly.

⁴ Mac Giolla Chríost, D. and Bonotti, M. 2018. *Brexit, language policy and linguistic diversity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵ Manzoor, S. A. et al. 2021. [The Return of Wooded Landscapes in Wales: An Exploration of Possible Post-Brexit Futures](#). *Land* 10(1), 59.

⁶ Messenger, S. 2020. [Brexit: Farming 'vital as Welsh language stronghold'](#). London: BBC and Farmers' Union of Wales. 2020. [Recognising the importance of agriculture to the Welsh language](#). Aberystwyth: Farmers' Union of Wales.