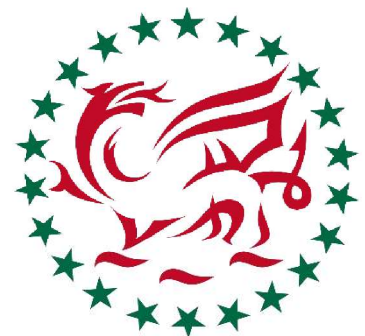




Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations: Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

3rd September 2021



CLILC • WLGA

¹Please note there is a change of date as UKGOV have amended the timetable re. boundary costs

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales. The three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The Welsh Local Government Association welcomes this opportunity to comment / respond on the Senedd Committee inquiry: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations: Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
4. Comments on each of the questions listed in terms of reference for the inquiry are provided below.

Current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Welsh Language

- Decrease in the number of entries for Welsh Language AS qualifications

The Joint Council for Qualifications published detailed results on the number of entries for Welsh (First and Second Language) qualifications in August 2021.

There was a positive trend in the number of student entries for Welsh Second Language A levels; a 32% increase between 2020 and 2021. However, there was a 17% decrease in the number of AS entries for Welsh Second Language between 2020 and 2021. This could reflect the decrease in confidence among Welsh Second Language learners who were considering which AS subjects to select shortly after the end of the first lockdown, to begin their AS studies in September 2020.

To meet the ambitious Cymraeg 2050 targets and Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, it is important to increase the number of students succeeding in Welsh language qualifications year on year. This is essential in eventually securing the pipeline of teachers that can teach through the medium of Welsh to meet these midterm targets.

- Student loss of skills and confidence in speaking Welsh

Pupils from non-Welsh speaking homes have not benefited from the full Welsh language immersion that usually takes place in Welsh medium settings, due to the significant periods of remote learning last year. This in turn has contributed to a loss of confidence and Welsh language skills that will need to be rebuilt.

Pupils across Wales have also had fewer opportunities to hear and practise using their Welsh language skills in social settings during the pandemic. Fewer opportunities to use Welsh through play, community events and groups could negatively influence how young learners perceive the Welsh language i.e., viewing Welsh as a language linked to schoolwork as opposed to a living, thriving language in their community. This can pose a barrier to learning, both practically and in terms of providing the motivation to use the language.

- Fewer opportunities to promote the use of the Welsh Language

Working from home or the requirement to keep a social distance from colleagues, is likely to have resulted in less Welsh being used in the workplace, particularly conversational Welsh. Hearing Welsh in the workplace and having the opportunity to practise using Welsh skills informally is often a key means of maintaining and developing Welsh language skills for learners.

Fewer opportunities to see and experience Welsh as an 'everyday language' with the changes to cultural events and activities will also have had a negative impact on Welsh language experiences i.e., Eisteddfodau, festivals, agricultural shows, opportunities for collective worship, as well as engagement with Welsh language networks or societies such as Mentrau Iaith, Young Farmers clubs & Merched y Wawr.

Further support needed from the Welsh & UK Government to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable post- pandemic recovery

- Funding to support Welsh language immersion projects and interventions.
- Promotion and reintroduction of Welsh language cultural events and effective marketing to a wider audience.
- Monitoring the number of entries for Welsh Language qualifications at all levels and promoting these opportunities.
- Continuing to incentivise the number of ITE entrants training through the medium of Welsh.

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- Encouraging workplaces to review their use of Welsh in the workplace policies and mitigating against any potential adverse effects of working remotely on the use of the Welsh language.
- Additional funding and promotion of Welsh language courses for adults.

What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term in relation to the Welsh Language?

- Developing and implementing policies that support jobs growth in Welsh speaking communities.
- Improving the digital infrastructure in rural communities.
- Supporting Welsh language community groups to restart key initiatives in person.
- Increasing the number of students accessing Welsh Medium provision.
- Supporting local authorities and schools to successfully transition along the Welsh medium provision (School Categories according to Welsh Medium provision, draft guidance 2020).
- Additional funding and promotion of Welsh language courses for adults.

Current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Culture and Sports

You will be aware of the many challenges facing the arts and sports sectors, some of which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, but many existed before the recent public health emergency. What the pandemic has clearly demonstrated however is the importance of clear dialogue and collaboration between local government and Welsh Government in overcoming challenges and finding effective solutions. The Culture Recovery Fund was very much welcomed and helped the arts sector stay afloat during the pandemic. Conversations are now needed to protect the investments made and build a more sustainable pathway in going forward. Both sectors have worked aimlessly throughout the whole crisis, and as we move to recovery, we must ensure we value the efforts and contributions made.

What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term in relation to Culture and Sport?

- Funding to protect investment and secure a sustainable pathway for the future
- Clarify what the main priority areas mean for the culture and sports sectors. For example, what does environmental justice in the culture and sports sectors look like? What do we mean by 'diversity'? Each priority area will need to include practical examples of ways in which organisations can demonstrate their

commitment to its development and evolution and build capacity, recording and action on it within their practices, procedures, governance, and activities.

- Flexibility, encouragement, and consideration of how the different sectors work together for the most impact. Libraries for example are in every community, have trained staff, good community links, are trusted institutions, and help deliver on many national and local policies. Their impact could be far, far greater with more fore-thought and better funding.

How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you or your organisation?

- The new UK-EU relationship affects local authorities in a number of ways, which have been compounded by Covid-related impacts (as well as the ongoing repercussions for container traffic of the Suez Canal blockage back in March). There are direct effects such as the impact on supply and price of goods and services. A number of commodities (especially building materials) are hard to source, and this is forcing prices upwards. This is being exacerbated by the shortage of HGV drivers, forcing up wages/costs (again a complex mix of Brexit/immigration restrictions and Covid, leading to job swapping to chase the highest returns). The driver shortages are affecting some food supplies (which has implications for care homes, school meals etc). There are also indirect effects on the local economy. Businesses struggling with extra paperwork and delays (additional costs) for exports (including goods and services and agriculture and fisheries) have been doubly impacted as a result of Covid restrictions, reducing trade and accelerating the shift towards online shopping and other changes in shopping preferences (e.g., product substitution). Whilst this is creating jobs in some areas it is also causing business failures in others. Shortages of labour are also affecting agriculture, tourism, and hospitality and, in some areas, social care. The specific reasons will vary from place to place but the loss of East European labour following Brexit has certainly been an important contributory factor. The spatial impact of this is uneven but where unemployment rises as a result of business failures, this can have knock-on effects on demand for local government services (e.g.in relation to housing and, over time, services such as child protection, substance misuse, mental health, community safety).

What support have you received to respond to the changes?

- Welsh Government has provided financial support via WLGA for a Brexit support programme. A Brexit co-ordinator post in each LA was funded and this has

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continued into 2021/22 to deal with issues of EU transition. These posts have provided invaluable corporate support within LAs, ensuring a joined-up approach across service areas. WLGA has shared good practice and commissioned a range of support for LAs to avoid all 22 having to undertake the same assessments. Further information is available here: [Brexit Transition Support Programme for Welsh local authorities - WLGA](#). A joint Welsh Government - local authority senior level panel has also been meeting regularly to consider issues as they have arisen and agree on responses and support required. WLGA has worked with the WG Economy department to share information about Brexit for local businesses with economic development departments across Wales. Substantial financial support to businesses has been distributed via a mixture of Business Wales and LAs to help businesses survive through the Covid pandemic, which has no doubt also helped to support some companies through difficulties resulting from EU transition. Attention is now turning to economic support for recovery and reconstruction.

What further support, if any, is needed from Welsh and UK Governments?

- As well as ongoing financial support, continuation of a dialogue on Brexit/transition issues is vital. Sharing of information and intelligence has been crucial throughout all stages of Brexit and enabled rapid dissemination of information about impending changes, new requirements etc. The UKG support measures such as the furlough scheme, as well as their direct Covid-related purpose, will have provided some relief from Brexit-related impacts. Ending of such assistance (and, for example UKG's Self Employed Income Support Scheme) will remove a safety net for many businesses that has been keeping some of them afloat. In a harsher, post-Brexit environment there is a risk that some businesses will have lost markets and/or seen cost increases and experienced labour shortages and will not survive. In the event of serious localised economic problems (e.g., closure or downsizing of any major companies) UKG and WG need to be ready to step in with support and to work with LAs to help deal with the consequences. Work undertaken during the run-up to Brexit to look at vulnerable sectors will be of use in helping to identify potentially 'at risk' areas. Opportunities to draw in investment to secure access to the UK market also need to be pursued, especially as reintroduction of import controls from October and January will increase costs of Continental companies exporting to the UK. There are also opportunities for a green recovery stimulus package of the sort proposed by WLGA in the following: ¹

<https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&fileid=2796&mid=665> which applies equally to dealing with the economic impact of EU transition issues as to the economic shock created by Covid.

For further information please contact:

Sharon Davies, Head of Education

sharon.davies@wlga.gov.uk

Welsh Local Government Association

One Canal Parade

Cardiff

CF10 5BF

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