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Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

Via e-mail: [SeneddCulture@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddCulture@senedd.wales)

29 November 2021

Dear Chair and Committee Members

**Written evidence from the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (the Coleg) for the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee's one day inquiry**

Thank you for the invitation to give oral evidence to the Culture Committee on 8 December and for the opportunity to submit written evidence prior to the session. I would like to submit a response on behalf of the Coleg regarding the challenges facing organizations that support and promote the Welsh language, including:

- the immediate and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector;
- the sector's plans to ensure recovery;
- our priorities in the context of the Committee's work in the Sixth Senedd; and
- our priorities in the context of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2022-23.

Our response will focus on the main factors relating to the Coleg's remit that affect the Welsh Government's language strategy to create a million people who speak and use the Welsh language by 2050. The Coleg's work in the post-compulsory sector, which includes further education, apprenticeships and higher education, contributes directly to the aims of the Government's language strategy, and the Coleg has the potential to make an even more substantial contribution over the next five years if it receives the necessary support and investment to do so.

**Cymraeg 2050: the Government's new plan for 2021-26**

The Coleg has welcomed the [new plan](#) announced by the Government in July this year that outlines what the Government will do during 2021-26 to achieve a million Welsh speakers and double the daily use of Welsh by 2050. The recognition within the document of the key role of the post-compulsory sector, and of the Coleg's role as one of the Government's core partners, is very welcome.

We further welcome the commitments in the [Co-operation Agreement](#) between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru to invest in the Coleg to increase the proportion of further education provision and apprenticeships provided through the medium of Welsh, and to set new ambitions to expand the Welsh-medium education workforce.

- **Training Welsh language teachers**

Given the importance to the national language strategy of ensuring an adequate supply of teachers, the shortfall of over 300 primary and 500 secondary teachers is of great concern to the Coleg and a number of other individuals and organizations, including the Welsh Language Commissioner, pressure group Dyfodol i'r Iaith and teachers' union UCAC. While the Government's new plan recognizes that ensuring an adequate supply has been a challenge, the Coleg is not confident that the interventions currently in place are sufficient to transform the situation.

We very much welcome the reference to the Government's development of a 10-year plan to increase the number of teachers of Welsh and Welsh-medium teachers and improve the language skills of the education workforce so that local needs can be met in line with each county's WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan). Although no further details on this have yet been announced, we welcome the reference to "expanding the Coleg's role". Several papers have been submitted to the Government over the last eighteen months in relation to our concerns about the teacher training sector and our desire to take on a more significant role in planning for the training of Welsh language teachers. We are currently discussing with the Government how our responsibilities in this area can be developed as we have the experience, the expertise and the will to support them and the Education Workforce Council in carrying out their statutory duties in this area. While we remain keen to take on an expanded role to lead on planning in this area, a bid was submitted to the Government in September for a budget of £150,000 to implement two specific projects during 2022-23 which will contribute to its strategy to attract and support more students to qualify as Welsh-medium teachers. The projects involve engaging with students studying outside Wales to persuade and attract them to return to Wales to train as teachers, and a mentoring scheme to support students who are less confident in their Welsh language skills to make the choice to train as Welsh language teachers.

- **Welsh-medium Education Bill**

We look forward to discussions with the Government in due course regarding the Welsh-medium Education Bill and issues relating to the Coleg. Strengthening the Coleg's statutory status through legislation would place the Coleg on a firm footing to continue and extend its influence over the sectors concerned in the coming years.

- **The Coleg's budget**

Another development that we welcome in the Government's new plan is the commitment to provide additional funding to the Coleg over five years to expand provision in further education, apprenticeships and higher education, and this is reinforced in the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru.

To date, the Coleg's budget to operate in the post-16 sector has been very limited, and there is an urgent need to invest in this area if we are serious about seeing a change at grassroots level where there has been no tradition of Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching. The Government found £810,000 for the 2021-22 financial year to begin work on increasing the number of staff and tutors who can teach through the medium of Welsh and bilingually in colleges in the priority areas, namely health and care, public services and childcare. The additional funding for further education colleges was welcomed, but in order to continue investing in these areas, to expand into other areas such as agriculture, tourism and leisure, construction, business and performing arts, and to develop Welsh-medium and bilingual apprenticeships, the Coleg submitted a bid to the Government in September

for an additional budget of £1,090,000 for the post-16 sector in 2022-23. Further increases will be required in 2023-24 to maintain and add to these developments.

The Coleg has been active in higher education for a decade, and the position of the Welsh language in the sector has been transformed as a result. The provision available to students is now extensive and the number of lecturers teaching through the medium of Welsh has increased significantly. The first five years of the Coleg saw a significant increase in the number of students studying part of their degree through the medium of Welsh, but following a budget cut in 2016, and an increase in the number of Welsh students choosing to study at universities outside Wales, we have not seen the same progress since. Initial evidence also suggests that the pandemic period has had some effect on the number of Welsh speakers choosing to study a proportion of their degree through the medium of Welsh with so many students (especially those whose home language is not Welsh) losing the habit of using Welsh daily while studying from home. The lack of face-to-face contact with lecturers has also limited the ability of staff to influence student choices and encourage them to choose Welsh-medium pathways.

The Coleg believes that new audiences can be attracted to the Welsh language in the higher education sector and we are currently developing exciting plans to this end. Due to the challenging financial situation of the universities, additional Government investment will be key to making progress while, at the same time, protecting existing Welsh-medium subjects and provision. We have submitted a bid to the Government for an additional budget of £213,168 for 2022-23 to implement our higher education plans.

- **Developing a bilingual health and care workforce**

The recently published [evaluation](#) of *More than Just Words* (the Welsh Government's strategy to ensure Welsh language services in health, social services and social care) highlights the scale of the challenge facing the Government and Health Boards in making services freely available to the public in Wales in the language of their choice. While the report shows that some progress has been made since the publication of the strategy in 2012, particularly in higher education as a result of investment by the Coleg Cymraeg, the report also notes that a considerable amount of work and focus locally and nationally is needed in order to deliver the original seven goals.

Health Boards across Wales report that recruiting a bilingual workforce is a challenge, and developing more bilingual training opportunities in the post-16 and higher education sectors is therefore a priority for the Coleg over the coming years.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) is the body responsible for planning and developing the NHS workforce in Wales, and it has a substantial budget for this purpose. The Coleg already works with HEIW, but the Coleg would like to develop a strategic relationship with HEIW in order to agree appropriate targets and goals and develop bespoke plans to increase the Welsh language and bilingual skills of the health service workforce in Wales. The Coleg wishes to see such a plan incorporating a commitment to include language awareness as a core and standard part of the training of all prospective health and care practitioners in Wales, with clear targets being set for the number of trainees enrolling on bilingual provision across all health courses each year. HEIW would need to identify an appropriate budget to support universities to deliver this. This fits in with Social Care Wales and HEIW's [Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy](#) published by the Welsh Government in 2020.

- **Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill**

The Coleg has submitted an initial written response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee outlining our response to the Tertiary Education and Research Bill and we will be presenting oral evidence to the Committee on 2 December.

**Context:**

The decision to establish the Coleg was made by the then Welsh Government in 2007, in view of the need for an independent planning body in the higher education sector to focus specifically on Welsh-medium and bilingual provision. The decision to extend its responsibilities to further education and apprenticeships in 2017/18 was further recognition of the need for a specific body with expertise in the field to have strategic responsibility in relation to the Welsh language, given that organizations with other varied and important duties cannot carry out this role and do not have the expertise or experience to do so. This identified need for the Coleg's work in higher education continues, and our work in further education and apprenticeships is only just beginning.

The Coleg is an independent organization and a registered charity. It has a strong governance structure, and has a board consisting of a chair and up to twelve members appointed through a process of open advertisement.

**Generally:**

The Coleg supports the proposal to establish a Commission for Tertiary Education and Research and looks forward to supporting the establishment and embedding of the new body in a way that will have a positive impact on Welsh-medium and bilingual provision in the post-compulsory sector.

While recognizing that some disruption is inevitable in dissolving an existing body and moving other Government responsibilities into a new body, every possible effort should be made to avoid an indefinite period of uncertainty, which could hinder progress in the areas concerned.

**Responsibilities in relation to the Welsh language and the Commission's relationship with the Coleg:**

We note that the Bill has placed responsibilities on the Commission in relation to the Welsh language and that further details are set out in the [Welsh Language Impact Assessment](#), including the fact that the Commission, in conjunction with the Coleg, will be responsible for Welsh-medium developments in tertiary education. We believe that consideration should be given to including some of the points made in the impact assessment on the face of the bill in order to emphasize the expectation that the Commission should act proactively, rather than passively, to deliver the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy, and collaborate with the Coleg at a strategic level to achieve this.

Pages 126-29 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#) outline the Commission's full responsibilities in relation to the Welsh language. While welcoming the fact that this is explicitly included,

most of these duties are already part of the Coleg's responsibilities, and increasingly so since the Coleg's responsibilities were extended to include the post-16 sector. The need for a dedicated body with the necessary expertise to act for the Welsh language and bilingualism in the fields of higher education, further education and apprenticeships remains as vital as ever, therefore the extent to which the Bill and the accompanying documentation reflects this unequivocally should be given careful consideration.

The Coleg works effectively with a range of bodies who have statutory duties, including the Education Workforce Council, Health Education and Improvement Wales, Qualifications Wales and Estyn, as well as the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). In the case of HEFCW, it has an MoU with the Coleg to facilitate effective collaboration. We trust that the effective ways of working that are already in place will provide a strong basis to build an effective relationship with the new Commission, but in developing the new working relationship, it is suggested that the Coleg should have more direct involvement in planning processes, and that relevant funding responsibilities should be delegated to the Coleg, in line with current arrangements for higher education and the evolving model for further education and apprenticeships.

#### **The Coleg's funding arrangements:**

We note that the Bill recognizes that the Coleg should continue to be funded by the Welsh Government and very much welcome this commitment. Receiving a budget directly from the Government underlines the importance of the post-compulsory field to the long-term national language strategy, and this should not be undermined in any way. It is unclear at this point why a short to medium term period is specified for this model of funding in the related Memorandum, given that the Government's language strategy aims for the long term targets of creating a million Welsh speakers and doubling the daily use of Welsh by 2050.

#### **Research and the Welsh Language:**

We welcome the expectation that the Commission would be required to comply with the Welsh Language Standards, and would therefore need to consider the Welsh language in all its activities. We note that this would extend to areas not directly related to provision, such as academic research.

#### **Other related matters:**

In supporting the Welsh Government's vision in establishing the Commission, we are aware that this does raise some matters that need to be addressed. Following the extension of the Coleg's responsibilities to the post-16 sector, for example, we are aware of matters raised by colleagues in the sector that relate to the relationship between schools and colleges in the context of A level provision. This is a complex and sensitive issue in relation to the Welsh language and we would like reassurance that every effort will be made to ensure that decisions are not taken that could lead to unforeseen consequences. The Coleg is already supporting the Government to promote Welsh as a subject. We would be prepared to expand on this work, if given sufficient resources to do so.

Consideration should also be given at this point to the relationship between the Tertiary Education and Research Bill and the proposed Welsh-medium Education Bill which is

another important element of this Government's programme. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language has stated publicly that consideration will be given to placing the Coleg's role on a statutory footing in that bill; it is important therefore to ensure that the Tertiary Education Bill does not limit the potential to achieve this.

We have kept our comments quite broad and brief in this letter, but a manifesto document was developed before the election detailing our policy and funding proposals for the new Government, which can be found on our [website](#).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written evidence to this important one day inquiry. We look forward to our oral evidence session on 8 December. If you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact Gwenllian Griffiths at [g.griffiths@colegcymraeg.ac.uk](mailto:g.griffiths@colegcymraeg.ac.uk).

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ioan Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'I'.

**Dr Ioan Matthews**

**Chief Executive**