



MENTRAU IAITH

30/11/2021

Written response from Mentrau Iaith Cymru, on behalf of the network of local Mentrau Iaith, to the questions posed by the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee before the one-day inquiry on the challenges facing organisations that support and promote the Welsh language on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2021.

### **The immediate and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector**

#### **Immediate:**

**Furlough-** at one point in 2020, 239 out of 354 staff that the Mentrau Iaith network employ were on the furlough scheme, thankfully only 4 posts were lost permanently during this initial period.

Many of the Mentrau lost significant income because of the pandemic, as companies and enterprises they run could not trade, these included childcare settings, shops, cafes, and translation companies. \*national figures for 20/21 income and turnover yet to be compiled, hopefully available 8.12.21

**Digital-** this is one element where the pandemic helped improve services, the Mentrau, like others, had to move quickly to provide quality online services to engage with their audiences, elements of this provision will carry on in the long term.

More people started **learning Welsh** online and through various apps during this time, therefore more people want to engage with the opportunities the Mentrau offer to use the Welsh language, the Mentrau continued to offer these local opportunities which are so important to individuals and communities.

#### **Long Term:**

It is not yet clear what the long-term effects of this period has had on various Mentrau Iaith companies and enterprises, such as childcare services, shops, cafes, and translation companies, and whether they will return to pre covid turnover levels.

People buying second homes/ holiday homes and properties being turned into holiday accommodation in areas that have a large percentage of Welsh speakers, this is the biggest long-term effect the pandemic has had on the Welsh language, and therefore on the work of the Mentrau Iaith.

It is difficult to see a way in which the language can survive as a community language in these areas while local young people are priced out of the housing market.

We welcome the recent announcement by the Welsh Government re. a cap on the amount of holiday homes allowed in certain communities, but the measures announced need to be actioned immediately and further work needs to be done quickly on this subject.

More people are also moving to live permanently in communities with a large percentage of Welsh speakers, this means more work for entities like the Mentrau Iaith in these areas, but there is not the capacity at present to do this extra work.

Organising events has become a much more time-consuming matter during this period and this is foreseen to carry on for a fair while. Not only is there a need to offer the digital and in the flesh services side by side, but there is also much more work involved when organising events. Covid specific risk assessments, cancellation procedures, registers of attendees and so forth all take extra time, these things make it less likely that groups will organise events for themselves and put added pressure on the Mentrau Iaith to deliver.

**Sector plans for recover;**

Supporting local groups to re-start events when the covid restrictions allow, is the focus of the Mentrau Iaith now, and continue to offer opportunities for people to use the Welsh language, while adhering to any current guidelines.

Volunteers- for the Mentrau Iaith themselves and supporting other groups to engage with and support more volunteers, is a priority for us 2022.

**Any current and future impact arising from Brexit;**

Because of covid we believe the full long-term impact of Brexit is yet to come to the fore. But, obviously, with a network like the Mentrau, for whom finding additional funds from various sources is vital\*, losing out on the opportunities that European funds offered is going to be a big blow, somehow the gap this has created as a funding opportunity for the third sector in Wales, will need to be filled from somewhere else.

\*Before covid the Mentrau annually received about £2.5million in total as “Hybu and Hyrwyddo” grants from Welsh Government but created an annual combined turnover of over £6.9million and employ over 300 across Wales.

**Your priorities for the Committee during the Sixth Senedd; and your priorities for the forthcoming Welsh Government Draft Budget 2022-23.**

Our priority for the 2022-23 budget is to try and ensure the Mentrau Iaith network does not lose any current grants received from Welsh Government.

We are pragmatic and understand that it is a very difficult period regarding funding, and therefore we are not looking for additional funding, just to protect what we already receive.

Our aim, to increase the opportunities for people to use the Welsh language, will stay the same and we will be doing this through cooperation, working in partnership, being innovative and perseverance.