
Consultation Response

Name:	Owen Evans
Role:	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
Email:	[REDACTED]
Tel No:	029 2044 6446
Date:	22.06.22
Subject:	Estyn's response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee for information regarding the inquiry into Welsh medium education, with a particular focus on The Welsh language strategic plans in education.

Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, Estyn is independent of the Welsh Government.

Estyn's main aim is to raise standards and improve the quality of education and training in Wales. This is mainly set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2005. In carrying out its functions, Estyn must consider:

- The quality of education and training in Wales;
- The extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- The educational standards achieved by education and training providers in Wales;
- The quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; and the
- Contribution made to learners' wellbeing.

Estyn's remit includes (but not exclusively) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary schools, secondary schools, independent schools, pupil referral units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, learning on the job, and teacher education and training.

Estyn can advise the Welsh Parliament on any matter relating to education and training in Wales. In order to achieve excellence for learners, Estyn has set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential

Response

Introduction

The quality and ambition of the Welsh-medium education strategic plans vary greatly. At best, they are keen and clear regarding on their goals and offer certainty regarding how they operate. The less successful schemes lack ambition and implementation detail. Having said that, they are an improvement on the previous plans,

Overall, the planning requirements over ten years are a positive step and achieving specific targets in terms of a number of learners taught through the medium of Welsh in year 1 and the appropriate emphasis on pre-school education is sensible. Seeing the importance of early and late immersion is a very positive step and gives learners at different points on their educational journey the opportunity to join the journey to becoming bilingual.

Joint working across authorities is rare and even where this is highlighted in one authority's plan, other neighbouring authority schemes often give little recognition to the joint working. Opportunities are also missed to expand and co-ordinate post-16 provision. Joint working across authorities to secure Welsh-medium ALN provision is more evident in the plans where this is relevant. Perhaps the main weakness is the inadequate attention given to developing Welsh as a subject and a medium primarily in the English-medium schools.

Consultation questions

The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee and the Children, Young People and Education

Committee is conducting an investigation into Welsh-medium education, with a particular focus on WESPs (Welsh in Education Strategic Plans). This is a joint inquiry, and will look at how the statutory framework established to promote the planning and development of Welsh-medium education works.

To inform the inquiry, Members would like to hear from you regarding the following questions:

- In December 2015, the Fourth Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee published recommendations in its report on the '**Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans**'. Has the current statutory framework for WESPs improved since then?

In 2015, a review of the strategy was published on behalf of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. The report identified a number of recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of the schemes, and in particular their impact. Overall, the inquiry recommendations have contributed to improvements in the quality of the plans and increased the likelihood that they will improve provision. Planning over a ten-year period has certainly allowed a more strategic consideration of the actions

needed to be taken and identifying specific targets to strive for is a useful step.

It was noted that there was a need to ensure that the strategy's targets were reflected in the WESPs and that Government officials needed to be firmer in approving the plans to ensure that they reflect the Welsh Government's ambition. The plans submitted by authorities appear to meet the targets in terms of the number of year 1 pupils being taught through the medium of Welsh. The ambition set out in the individual plans varies, but each of them meets the minimum targets at least, as set out in the guidance.

The consultation on school categorisation has been a positive step. Although there was some opposition to the original proposals, the government responded to the feedback, specifically by including a clearer definition of what is meant by a designated Welsh-medium school. However, most of the draft plans do not specifically address the proposed categories. This is partly because the final policy was not published when local authority officers were preparing their early drafts.

The latest requirements include a clause requiring authorities to outline their plans to promote the Welsh language. Each authority's plans set out their intentions to promote the Welsh language in a variety of ways. It is difficult for us to measure the quality and impact of this work at this stage.

The review notes the importance of strengthening the roles of language forums in the process of leading the strategic plans. It was noted that there was a lack of consistency in approach and membership. The evidence across Wales does not suggest that there has been a major change in the overall influence of language forums. In the best cases, for example in Newport, the forums are influential and challenging, and play an important role in the process of designing and shaping the strategic plans.

The strategic role of the regional consortia does not feature prominently in the plans submitted by the authorities. There are references to the consortia's contribution to the professional development of the education workforce in the context of the Welsh language, subject support in the secondary and the preparation of resources for the immersion units. However, overall, there are few references to the role of consortia in assisting with intentional language planning across authorities in the regions. Authorities have been discussing and co-planning in some cases, for example in south-east Wales, Blaenau Gwent's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan refers to the joint working through the South East Wales Consortium as they track and plan Welsh-medium secondary education across county boundaries e.g. Ysgol Gwynllyw in Torfaen and considering opening a secondary school to serve the Heads of the Valleys area.

- To what extent do the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans contribute to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – **Cymraeg 2050**;

Overall, the plans contribute positively to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy - Cymraeg 2050. The targets set ensure that the numbers receiving Welsh-medium education by the time the plans come to an end meet the targets set by the Government. However, it must be acknowledged that only plans have been submitted, and that there is a need to monitor and scrutinise how these are being implemented over the ten-year period, and the likelihood of changes being made to the officials and elected members who will be responsible for leading the plans during the period.

- How are local authorities responding to changes to guidance on categories of schools by Welsh-medium provision, and are they meeting the Welsh Government's ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools?

The picture across Wales differs, and this is to some extent due to the linguistic context and structural pattern of provision for Welsh and English-medium education. For example in south and north-east Wales, designated Welsh and English schools are the norm, and there is very little variation. In north and south west Wales, there are complex patterns of designated Welsh-medium schools with a continuum of varying arrangements of provision.

In south-east Wales, references to increasing Welsh-medium provision in schools that are predominantly English-medium are rare. The plans set out intentions either to fill the surplus places already in the Welsh-medium education sector, or to open new provision in areas that are currently geographically distant from a cohort of pupils who may wish to access Welsh-medium education. For example, Bridgend Council is planning to expand primary provision by relocating one school to a more accessible site, establishing a Welsh stream in an English-medium school and planning to open a new Welsh-medium school in the south west of the County. There is no reference to encouraging other schools, be they primary or secondary, to move along the linguistic continuum. There are references to improving standards in Welsh as a subject and also to working with Bridgend College to increase the provision specifically of their vocational courses. Generally, the remaining plans of most of the authorities in the south and north east are of the same nature.

Newport has a plan that includes targets that are higher than those set by the Welsh Government. The plan includes steps towards the development of dual stream schools which is also part of Cardiff Council's vision of opening schools in new housing estates.

In authorities in the south and north west, the picture is more mixed. Five authorities clearly state their desire to increase Welsh-medium provision in schools that are predominantly English-medium or have Welsh-medium streams. For example, Ceredigion sets out in its plan the steps to ensure that six of its seven secondary schools are category 3 during the lifetime of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. They identify the actions to achieve the intentions, for example by engaging with the governing boards of those schools as part of the initial consultation and

after the plan has been approved by the Council. This means a significant change to secondary provision in the authority. Gwynedd and Anglesey set out their high-level intentions to increase Welsh-medium provision in their secondary schools, but without the detail and certainty of action seen in Ceredigion. Similarly, Carmarthenshire is planning to change the linguistic categories of a number of their primary schools that are currently dual-stream schools and also to build and expand Welsh-medium provision in secondary schools throughout the authority. Pembrokeshire is a good example of an authority that is making significant steps to increase Welsh-medium provision in secondary and primary schools. The steps are ambitious e.g. changing the linguistic category of Ysgol Bro Gwaun, which will be a challenging and politically sensitive task. Many authorities state that the targets need to be considered in the context of the trends that exist in the authority which include reductions in birth rates.

Overall, where the political will is firmly strong, the change in categories has offered an opportunity to look afresh at ways of expanding Welsh-medium provision. A number of authorities have seized the opportunity, but others are content with a more cautious approach and offer the minimum change that at best meets the minimum requirements.

- What challenges will arise in terms of planning and developing Welsh-medium provision, ahead of a proposed Welsh Medium Education Bill?

The main challenges will be to ensure we have enough staff with the required and necessary standard of Welsh language skills to teach the Welsh-medium subjects in our schools and in our pre-school providers. The strategy identifies this challenge and the government has just published a paper that has analysed this and proposed some actions.

Overall, the plans do not establish sufficiently specific links with the Welsh for adults sector and the work of the Centre for Learning Welsh. Because of this, opportunities are being missed in terms of working together to train the workforce and share good practice on effective pedagogy to acquire the language.

The WESP in most authorities responds to the requirements in a fairly cautious and conservative manner. They meet the requirements in terms of the targets set by the Government, but only a few authorities have taken the opportunity to carry them forward. Less ambitious authorities are happy with filling empty spaces to meet government targets often without considering the reasons for these.

The curriculum places an emphasis on developing pupils' oral skills but there are very few references in the strategic plans to how English-medium schools are going to improve this provision. This is generally the greatest weakness of the schemes in the areas where most schools are English medium.

Ensuring that learners can access Welsh-medium education at different stages of their educational journey is very important. Children's linguistic fate is too

dependent on their parents' decision in the pre-school period, but immersion offers a second opportunity to join on the journey to be bilingual. Ensuring adequate funding to establish and expand immersion provision is therefore essential.

[Welsh Immersion Education - Strategies and methods to support learners 3-11 years old](#)