

**Mudiad Meithrin's response: Additional questions following the evidence session on 13 October with the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee**

**Part of the process of developing provision in the English-medium sector is moving schools along the language continuum (i.e. from English medium to bilingual, or from bilingual to Welsh medium). What evidence is there that local authorities have sufficiently addressed this within their WESPs, and if not, what needs to change?**

Mudiad Meithrin acknowledges that the patterns of Welsh-medium education provision and bilingual education provision in Wales vary from area to area, and that a significant number of these variations reflect patterns of Welsh language use in the wider community. Our care and education systems must be flexible enough to be able to reflect the unique linguistic characteristics of Welsh communities. Nevertheless, it is important that we ensure that education planning is based on a clear and consistent understanding of the learners' linguistic outcomes.

Mudiad Meithrin recognises that school categorisation is a complex issue, and we welcome the recent efforts made by the Welsh Government to develop one consistent system across Wales, with the publication in 2021 of the *Guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision*. The Minister for Education noted the need for this to be statutory guidance, which would give the content a more solid foundation. However, we are concerned that the linguistic categorisation guidance is currently a non-statutory regime.

We welcome the policy aim, namely to increase Welsh language provision in Welsh schools, and to facilitate the process of moving up the linguistic categories. Without clear incentives, resources and concrete guidance, it is possible that this aim will not be achieved.

It will be necessary to collaborate with local authorities across Wales to ensure that the categorisation system for schools does not have a detrimental impact on the way that they create demand for Welsh medium education, especially when transitioning at the beginning of key stages during the life of the current WESPs. Here are some current examples:

- Denbighshire: moving along the linguistic continuum seems to be an integral part of the WESP.
- Conwy County: Dyffryn Conwy secondary school has already changed to become a dual-stream school, beginning with year 7 pupils.
- Powys: we feel that more discussions would be beneficial, but it is clearly visible in the WESP.
- Flintshire: Moving along the linguistic continuum does not appear to be a prominent target for individual settings in the WESP.

- Wrexham County: Moving along the linguistic continuum does not appear to be a prominent target for individual settings in the WESP.

As part of the process of developing provision within the English-medium sector and moving schools along the linguistic continuum, it will be necessary to carry out a Welsh-language skills audit for all staff who work in, and support, schools and early years education and care settings, not only teachers. This will provide an opportunity to identify where there is capacity to work through the medium of Welsh, and where additional investment is needed from the Welsh Government and local authorities to enable staff to deliver services through the medium of Welsh in specific settings and schools. We will need to ensure a better understanding of linguistic immersion in schools and in early years care and education settings. Mudiad Meithrin already provides bespoke training for the early years workforce as part of a childcare qualification provided through the National Training Scheme, the Camwrth Gam Schools Scheme, and also as CPD training through Academi.

Innovative work is taking place among CWLWM partners to identify English-medium childcare settings that can be converted into Welsh-medium childcare providers. This will take place over a period of time, with support provided on constitutional, linguistic and charity-related matters, recognising that it will be necessary to have ongoing discussions regarding the implications of this situation with regulators such as Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn.

It will be necessary to offer bespoke professional learning opportunities to teachers and other practitioners to support the progress of learners (and staff) in the Welsh language. This could include providing bespoke sessions for teachers at different stages of progress, and within different sectors, in order to give them opportunities to discuss and consider practical examples.

**A number of organisations have made reference to the need to build capacity among Welsh-medium Additional Learning Needs specialists, with the Children's Commissioner noting that lack of access to Welsh-medium support is a systemic issue throughout Wales. Could you expand on the specific challenges of increasing the number of Welsh-medium staff with appropriate subject specialisms, including Additional Learning Needs?**

There is a need to increase the number of people who can work through the medium of Welsh in a number of areas and specialist services. We propose that there is a need to prioritise this, in order to be able to provide proactive Welsh-medium services across the wider public sector and in other businesses. We note here the need to ensure the development of Welsh-language skills among current staff members at a number of support services, such as Flying Start staff, speech and language therapists, health visitors and those who work with children and young people, concurrently with any

plans to increase the capacity and provision of Welsh-medium education along the the different education stages.

We also note the need to ensure appropriate opportunities for post-16 students who wish to work in the care, education and health sectors to develop the necessary Welsh-language skills, alongside the studies that they undertake for their vocational qualifications. One part of this is ensuring that there are opportunities for individuals to pursue the relevant vocational and academic courses through the medium of Welsh, within a reasonable distance from their homes.

Access to ALN specialists who can speak Welsh tends to be a postcode lottery, especially outside Gwynedd, Anglesey, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion. There is a need to increase the number of people who can work through the medium of Welsh in a number of areas and specialist services – speech and language therapists, health visitors, those who work with children and young people, BSL specialists and teachers of the deaf, among others – concurrently with any plans to increase the capacity and provision of Welsh-medium education along the different education stages.

We are concerned that parents lack the confidence to choose Welsh-medium care and education for their children if they have additional learning needs, as the support is not available through the medium of Welsh. Another concern is that children are referred by specialist practitioners to English-medium provision where the specialism has been established. We welcome the Welsh Government's intention to develop a speech and language screening programme that is specific to Wales, but are there enough speech and language therapists across Wales to provide support for bilingual children (where the language in the home and the language in the setting are different)?

There will be a need to ensure that the professional experts have an understanding of how children with additional learning needs can benefit from attending Welsh-medium care and / or educational settings. This is essential, as parents can lack confidence when weighing up care and education options for children with additional learning needs, and choose to take the advice of specialist professionals before making a decision. Specialist practitioners need a better understanding of suitable approaches to providing support for bilingual and multilingual children; hopefully, this will lead to a situation where English-medium provision is not viewed as the norm for children with additional learning needs. Mudiad Meithrin staff already have plans in place to present information about bilingualism and the immersion approach to practitioners within the health service.

Ceredigion County Council acknowledges that there is a language gap regarding the availability of programmes and training in Welsh and English. Ceredigion's Strategic Plan for 2022-2023 refers to the need for 'high quality bilingual ALN training resources' (p. 27). It notes that the council has 'translated

a speech and language skills assessment programme (Wellcomm) so that it is suitable for use within Ceredigion', and has 'adapted and translated training playlists shared by the County of Swansea.' (p. 27)