

Free Welsh lessons for everyone who wants to learn the language in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 05 Mehefin 2023
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Petition title: Free Welsh lessons for everyone who wants to learn the language in Wales.

Text of petition:

Many people in Wales are very keen to learn Welsh, and people who live here and people who move to our country want to see the language flourish and grow. But a great many people also find it difficult to afford Welsh lessons, and using Duolingo is not a suitable learning method for everyone. Therefore, we need to ensure that everyone has a fair opportunity to learn Welsh without having to worry about the cost, and that there is also an appropriate method for people to learn.

In order to achieve a million Welsh speakers, we need to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn the language

1. Background

The Welsh Government's ambition is to see the number of Welsh speakers in Wales increase to 1 million by 2050, which would almost double the current



number of Welsh speakers in Wales. The 2021 Census results showed that 538,300 people in Wales aged 3 or over reported they could speak Welsh. This is a decrease of around 23,700 people since Census 2011.

Expanding Welsh-medium provision and opportunities to learn and use the language are key themes in the Cymraeg 2050 Welsh language strategy. It notes that the:

Welsh for Adults sector has an important contribution to make to our aim of achieving a million Welsh speakers. It will do so by enabling adults of all ages and abilities to improve their skills, resume their study of Welsh or learn afresh to give them the confidence to be able to use Welsh in the workplace, socially or within the family.

The Welsh Government, through its funding of the National Centre for Learning Welsh, has been developing Welsh courses to support the development of adult Welsh language skills.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government directly funds the National Centre for Learning Welsh. The Centre (which runs its programmes under the banner – Learn Welsh) distributes funding to 11 course providers across Wales.

During 2021-22, a total of £8.7 million was distributed to Learn Welsh course providers.

Funding		
Funding summary for each course provider for the academic year 2021-2022:		
Learn Welsh Provider	Organisation	Total Grant for Provision
Learn Welsh Swansea Bay Region	Swansea University	£858,110
Learn Welsh Cardiff	Cardiff University	£966,347
Learn Welsh Ceredigion – Powys – Carmarthenshire	Aberystwyth University	£1,178,616
Learn Welsh North East	Coleg Cambria	£1,062,808
Learn Welsh North West	Bangor University	£1,430,539
Learn Welsh Gwent	Coleg Gwent	£1,136,387
Learn Welsh Glamorgan	University of South Wales	£996,067
Learn Welsh Nant Gwrtheyrn	Nant Gwrtheyrn	£190,000
Learn Welsh Pembrokeshire	Pembrokeshire County Council	£365,252
Learn Welsh Carmarthenshire	Carmarthenshire County Council	£172,396
Learn Welsh The Vale	Vale of Glamorgan Council	£303,478
TOTAL		£8,660,000

The Learn Welsh website notes that its Welsh courses are available during the daytime and evening, face-to-face or in virtual classrooms. It also notes that individuals can study independently, online.

The Minister's paper to the Committee notes that while offering free Learn Welsh courses is not part of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy, the Welsh Government's:

continued investment in the Learn Welsh sector means that fees for courses are kept to a minimal, with many learners accessing free tuition or paying discounted fees.

The National Centre for Learning Welsh

The National Centre for Learning Welsh, established in 2016, is responsible for all aspects of the Learn Welsh sector - from curriculum and course development to resources for tutors, marketing and e-learning.

The Centre not only develops provision for adults wishing to learn Welsh, but works with partners and employers to ensure proactive and flexible learning programmes are readily available to new speakers in the workplace.

The Minister for Education and the Welsh Language notes in his paper that the Centre has a "formal partnership in place with Say Something in Welsh and Duolingo", which provides learners with a wide range of learning provision and choice whilst ensuring resources are aligned. This, the Minister notes makes it "easier to move from one provider to another to suit the level of the learner and how they wish to learn".

Among its varied provision, the Centre offers online taster courses for anyone wishing to access them. These introduce everyday words and phrases and are available to everyone for free. People can also access free Learn Welsh videos on YouTube.

Cymraeg Gwaith | Work Welsh

The National Centre for Learning Welsh also receives funding to develop the Welsh language skills of workers across a range of sectors. These courses are often tailored to support the specific industry or service they're working in, and are free to access. Examples include Welsh for the Healthcare Sector, Social Care, Retail and the Tourism sector.

The Minister's paper highlights that 319 employers were involved in the Scheme in 2021-22, with over 6,000 individual employees undertaking a course.

Funding allocated to the National Centre for Learning Welsh will also deliver access to free Welsh language lessons to all education practitioners. This includes self-study courses through to higher level intensive courses. Education practitioners can also register to undertake an immersive 12 month Sabbatical Scheme course, funded by the Welsh Government.

Camau

Learn Welsh also delivers the 'Camau' scheme, which is an online self-study course at entry level (suitable for beginners, and those who have completed the taster courses) for practitioners in early-years settings. The course is fully funded, providing approximately 60 hours of independent learning. Among its aims is to assist early years practitioners to develop their Welsh language skills to use with children; learning the time; pronouncing the alphabet, colours, days of the week and numbering; and learn commands.

Through its partnership with Mudiad Meithrin, new parents or parents to be can register for Clwb Cwtsh, a free taster programme focussing on speaking Welsh with young children.

16 to 25 year olds

The Welsh Government, through its Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru included a commitment to invest in the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the National Centre for Learning Welsh. The aim was to increase the amount of Welsh-medium delivery in the apprenticeship and further education sector, and to provide free Welsh language learning for 16 to 25-year-olds.

Of an additional £4.5 million allocated for 2023-24 to support this programme, £2.8 million will be provided to the Coleg Cymraeg and £1.7 million to the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

Fees and financial support

While there is significant free Learn Welsh provision available, many of the mainstream courses do carry a fee. The Minister in his paper notes that a "generous fee policy is in operation across all providers". It notes that since 2019:

A single course fee of £90 has been in place for all courses, regardless of location, level or mode of delivery. Operating alongside this is a fee remission policy, which offers discounted fees for learners in priority groups or on priority courses. This includes a 40% discount for individuals in receipt of benefits, and a discount of up to 100% (i.e. offering courses free of charge) for refugees and asylum seekers.

The Minister's paper notes that current data shows that around 43% of learners on mainstream courses currently receive some discount on their fees.

There is also a specific Financial Contingency Fund to support those who wish to learn Welsh but are experiencing financial hardship. This funding can be used to help with costs associated with childcare, travel or buying resources for example.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In 2019, a petition was submitted calling for Free Welsh Lessons for the People of Wales. At the time, it collected 95 signatures, and was referred to the Petitions Committee.

On closing the petition, Leanne Wood AM stated at the time that

I'm not sure where we can take this further now, but I do still accept the point that, if the Government wants to increase the number of Welsh speakers to 1 million by 2050, they've got to do a lot more than they're doing now in terms of adult education. This petitioner shows that the financing of lessons is a barrier. I think some of us who feel strongly about this can put pressure elsewhere on this question, but I can't see where we can take this petition now. So, perhaps we can thank the petitioner for raising it, and undertake as individual Members to keep pressing the case for free classes in other aspects of our Assembly work.

The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee recently completed an inquiry looking at the legislative framework that supports Welsh-Medium education provision. While the focus of the inquiry was on supporting the development of Welsh language education provision, it did recommend that the Welsh Government:

- invests substantially in upskilling the current teaching workforce, providing greater numbers of teachers, teaching assistants and lecturers with the

- opportunity to undertake the Sabbatical Scheme [Welsh language immersion training course]; and
- that the Welsh Government considers whether the Sabbatical Scheme could be expanded to some early-years practitioners in Wales supporting Welsh-medium provision in the sector, or to promote and expand the Learn Welsh Scheme for Early Years Education and Childcare through Dysgu Cymraeg.

Laura Anne Jones MS tabled a written question on 16 March 2022 asking the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language whether the Welsh Government “have a target for the number of 18 to 25 year olds enrolling on free-of-charge courses with the National Centre for Learning Welsh”. The Minister responded noting that:

The Centre have set a target of attracting 2,500 learners aged 18-25 during 2022-23, and will revise this target annually as they plan the provision with their providers.

The National Centre for Learning Welsh are currently planning a marketing campaign over the summer to attract learners aged 18-25 to take advantage of the offer of free lessons. Learners in this age group will be able to enrol on any community course across the range of levels available, or will be able to join in specific courses which are being created for this age group.

Delivering free Welsh lessons to 18-25 year olds is being carried out in collaboration with Cefin Campbell MS, the Plaid Cymru designated member, as part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

A similar written question was asked by James Evans MS on 26 September 2022 with the same response provided by the Minister.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.