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27 November 2024

Dear Committee,

**Re: Call for information – Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for
2025–26**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2025–26.

The Coleg Cymraeg creates and promotes training and study opportunities in the Welsh language by working with further education colleges, schools, universities, apprenticeship providers and employers. We inspire and encourage everyone to use their Welsh language skills, with the aim of creating a bilingual workforce, including the education workforce itself. Our response to the consultation will focus on those elements of the Budget that are relevant to the Coleg's remit.

Welsh-medium and bilingual further education and apprenticeships

In 2018, the Coleg was given the responsibility for further education and apprenticeships, and we are currently implementing ambitious plans to develop provision for *all* learners in these sectors, whatever their Welsh language skills.

As a result of the Co-operation Agreement, the Coleg received additional funding in 2022-23 and 2023-24 to invest in new Welsh-medium and bilingual provision and staff in the further education colleges and apprenticeship providers. Over 60 facilitators were appointed in the colleges in priority areas such as Health and Care and Childcare, and over 20 assessors were funded within the apprenticeship field.

As a result of the increased budget, there has been a clear increase in bilingual learning activities in the post-16 sector since the Coleg was given this responsibility, as seen in the table below:

Learning activities with at least an element in Welsh:

Year	Further education	Work-based learning
2017/18	7.3%	10.3%
2018/19	8.7%	11.9%
2019/20	8.8%	13.0%
2020/21	14.7%	20.8%
2021/22	18.2%	25.3%

Data source: [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers – Annual report 2022/23 \(gov.wales p.24\)](#)

Due to the funding challenges faced by the Welsh Government in preparing the 2024-25 budget, the Coleg did not receive the promised increase of £840,000 for the third year of the Co-operation Agreement. Nevertheless, we welcomed the firm [commitment](#) from the Government and Plaid Cymru to re-profile the additional increase to the 2025-26 financial year. **It is critical that the Coleg receives this investment for 2025-26 in order to be able to continue investing, mainly within apprenticeships (work-based learning).**

An inquiry was carried out recently by the Senedd Culture Committee into the Development of post-16 Welsh language provision. Evidence was presented from a number of bodies in the sector stating that, in order to ensure that the provision continues to grow in a sustainable manner, it is vital that Welsh Government funding is maintained and increased over the coming years. We are awaiting the publication of the committee’s report and recommendations.

Funding Welsh-medium and bilingual further education and apprenticeships

The percentage of the Welsh Government's further education budget that is spent on Welsh-medium and bilingual further education and apprenticeships provision is 2%, while Welsh speakers represent 22% of learners. The Coleg Cymraeg and the Government's Welsh-medium and bilingual Further Education and Apprenticeship Action Plan targets *everyone* in the sector, regardless of their Welsh language skills.

Higher education

The Coleg was established in 2011. Since then, extensive Welsh-medium and bilingual provision has been developed across all the main subjects provided at Welsh universities. There are now over 8,660 students studying some of their degree course through the medium of Welsh, which is 27% of all Welsh speakers at universities in Wales.

The Coleg's latest Academic Plan outlines our plans for the next period, and one of the main objectives is to attract new audiences to Welsh-medium and bilingual higher education, including those who are less confident in using their Welsh. There are 19,786 Welsh speakers studying at a university in Wales, equating to 13% of the students at Welsh universities, and the Coleg is developing plans to attract more of them to study part of their course through the medium of Welsh. It is vital that the Coleg receives the anticipated funding to support this important work and to protect the provision that has already been established.

Funding Welsh-medium higher education

The percentage of the Welsh Government's higher education budget (not including the Student Support budget) that is spent on Welsh-medium and bilingual higher education provision is 3%, while Welsh speakers represent 13% of the students at universities in Wales.

Medr and funding Welsh-medium and bilingual tertiary education

In June 2023, the Coleg was designated by the Welsh Ministers to advise Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research), for the purpose of supporting it to fulfil its duties under section 9(1) of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, which relates to promoting tertiary education through the medium of Welsh.

We have presented initial overarching advice on policy, regulation and funding matters to Medr with the aim of informing its first Strategic Plan which will be presented to the Government in December. The advice, and Medr's response to that advice, will be published over the coming weeks.

In its consultation version of the Strategic Plan, Medr has indicated the intention, in accordance with the Strategic Priorities set for it by the Welsh Government and supported in the Coleg's initial advice, to develop a National Plan for the Welsh language in the tertiary education sector. The Coleg welcomes this and looks forward to providing Medr with further advice on the development of the plan.

In order to give effect to the Act's intention to encourage and meet the demand for Welsh-medium and bilingual provision in the tertiary sector, there will need to be a sufficient budget to invest in staff, provision and resources.

Welsh Language and Education Bill

Although the main focus of the Welsh Language and Education Bill is the statutory education system, it will lay foundations for progression to tertiary education and from there into the world of work. It will create the potential to ensure that many more children and young people in Wales are able to develop and use their Welsh language skills, and will ultimately help create the bilingual workforces that are so needed across various fields of employment. We need to start planning now to meet the needs of those who will be leaving the statutory sector and entering the tertiary sector as independent Welsh speakers.

In conclusion

The contribution of tertiary education to the achievement of the objectives of the Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy and the policy aims of the Welsh Language and Education Bill is clear, but financial investment is needed in order to meet those objectives.

We trust that the contents of this letter will be of benefit to the Senedd's committees as they proceed with the scrutiny of the Welsh Government's draft budget for 2025-26. For more information, please contact Gwenllian Griffiths, the Coleg's Director of Policy, Communications and Engagement, via g.griffiths@colegcymraeg.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ioan Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Ioan Matthews
Chief Executive

cc. The Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee (SeneddCulture@Senedd.Wales) and the Children, Young People and Education Committee (SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales)