

William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
CF99 1NA

8/4/2013

Dear Mr Powell,

The Petitions Committee, National Assembly for Wales (Ref: P-04-409/427)

Thank you for your letter requesting the Commissioner's opinion on the two petitions referenced above.

The main objective of the Commissioner is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. This is done by drawing attention to the fact that Welsh has official language status in Wales and by imposing standards on organisations. In turn, this will lead to the establishment of rights for Welsh speakers.

The work of the Commissioner is underpinned by two principles:

- The Welsh language should be treated no less favourably in Wales than the English language
- People in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of Welsh if they wish to do so

The following are the Welsh Language Commissioner's comments on the two petitions.

P-04-409: Welsh names for new trunk roads in Wales

We acknowledge the supportive spirit of this petition in respect of the Welsh language. The Welsh Government is responsible for trunk roads in Wales. We also acknowledge the Government's response to your request for comments on the aim of this petition, and we note that it would be difficult to name trunk roads that are very long and that stretch through different parts of the country. If the Government

wished, in due course, to name trunk roads in Wales, we would expect it to do so in accordance with its Welsh language scheme and, in turn, with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

P-04-427: A new Welsh language law for Wales

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 received royal assent in February 2011. The post of Welsh Language Commissioner was created by the Measure. The Measure sets a legal framework for the introduction of duties on some organisations to comply with statutory standards relating to the Welsh language. The standards will note how organisations will be expected to treat and use the Welsh language. The standards will be one method used to give legal effect to the official status of the Welsh language in Wales.

Over a period of time, new powers to impose standards on organisations, and to enforce them, will come into force through subordinate legislation. Until then, the Welsh Language Commissioner will continue to review statutory language schemes through the powers that she has inherited under Part 2 of the Welsh Language Act 1993. The Measure allows some private sector organisations to be open to complying with standards. Those categories are listed in Schedules 7 and 8 of the Measure. Until the statutory standards come into force, it is difficult to consider their full potential within the private sector.

The long title of the Measure refers to the rights of the individual, which will stem from the ability to enforce the duty to comply with standards, though it is fair to note that this is the only reference in the Measure to the rights of the individual.

The Commissioner believes that it is premature to make a statement about the full impact of the Measure at present. However, the Commissioner would welcome an annual meeting with the relevant Committee on this issue, given that one of the functions of the Commissioner, stipulated in Section 4 (2)(c), is *keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of the law relating to the Welsh language*.

Yours sincerely,

Meri Huws

Welsh Language Commissioner