

## **Evidence from the Centre for Welsh Politics and Society to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee's 'Cymraeg for All?' inquiry**

This response has been coordinated by the Centre for Welsh Politics and Society, which is an interdisciplinary research centre at Aberystwyth University with the aim of developing our understanding of contemporary politics and society in Wales, supporting and developing first class research in the social sciences, and contributing to public debate and policy development in Wales. The Centre's Regional or Minority Languages research theme brings together staff across a number of departments with expertise in this area.

This evidence focuses mainly on findings arising from research carried out by academics from Aberystwyth University and from our knowledge of developments in the context of other regional or minority languages as a result of involvement in projects such as Agile Cymru. We have included references to relevant work and publications. You are welcome to contact us if you would like to discuss any of these points further or if you would like to know more about the research behind them.

Those who have contributed to this response from Aberystwyth University (in alphabetical order) are Dr Hanna Binks, Dr Ben Ó Ceallaigh, Professor Rhys Jones, Dr Huw Lewis, Dr Elin Royles, and Anne Uruska.

One of the main challenges in terms of analysing the issues raised by the inquiry is the lack of research about the Welsh language. One of the reasons is the challenge of securing research funding for research related to the sociolinguistics of the Welsh language. One example of the feedback that we have received from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant application assessors when rejecting an application on language revival and socio-economic changes that focused on Welsh and Gaelic and placing them in the context of regional languages across Europe was: 'The Panel felt that this proposal was original and could potentially have an impact. The links with policy makers was welcomed, as was the involvement of non-academics. However, the Panel considered this to be too local/regional.'

Another example is feedback on a project application on the impact of COVID-19 on youth organisations working in the Celtic languages: '*However overall concerns were highlighted regarding the urgency of the project, it was felt that the case for urgency was not made fully.*' The implications of these types of decisions in response to grant applications are less research and a tendency towards smaller projects with less funding. Beyond the research councils, there is also a need for consistency in terms of transparency in research funding processes for issues relating to the Welsh language and sociolinguistics in Wales.

### **Context**

1. Give a brief overview of the main challenges in terms of **increasing use of the Welsh language** throughout Wales, and the specific challenges facing Welsh speakers and learners in areas that have **fewer Welsh speakers**.

When asking specifically about the challenges that arise in '**areas that have fewer Welsh speakers**', we suggest that it would be beneficial if the committee were to spend time weighing up exactly what they have in mind when using such terminology. As the research of Rhys Jones and Huw Lewis has shown, the geography of the Welsh language has changed in significant ways since the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> As a result, nowadays when referring to levels of Welsh speakers (more, fewer etc.), we need to be very clear as to whether we are discussing in terms

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<sup>1</sup> Jones and Lewis (2019).

of percentages or numbers of speakers, as they have different implications for the discussion. For example, the four counties in Wales that have the highest *percentage* (and therefore the highest density) of Welsh speakers are: Gwynedd; Anglesey; Carmarthenshire; and Ceredigion. However, the four counties that have the highest *number* of Welsh speakers are: Gwynedd; Anglesey; Carmarthenshire and Cardiff. Therefore, while a higher percentage of Welsh speakers live in Ceredigion, a higher number of speakers now live in Cardiff. This succinctly conveys the need for a little more care when referring to areas with more/fewer Welsh speakers. This is not just a technical point either. Rather, appreciating this diversity in the linguistic geography of Wales is important in order to avoid reinforcing a misleading geographical imagination – one that suggests that significant levels of Welsh speakers are only found in the west.

Beyond the above point, another challenge that arises when considering the question is the current weaknesses in gathering data on language use in Wales. There is an urgent need for quality data about language use that is gathered systematically and regularly. Currently, the Language Use Survey is relied upon to collect data about language use. It is not carried out regularly and does not assess in more detail below local authority level. This is a considerable gap in the ability of the Welsh Government and other stakeholders to assess progress in relation to the second main target of the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy, which is to increase the numbers using the Welsh language. As outlined in our report on methods of assessing language viability, there is room for improving data collection methods on language use across quantitative and qualitative data. The cases of the Basque Country and Catalonia provide examples where more comprehensive data are collected through different types of surveys, leading to far greater understanding of the levels of language use in those cases than in Wales.<sup>2</sup>

Research was carried out into use of the Welsh language among young people aged 16-18 in four education settings in different parts of Wales as part of the Education, Language and Identity project, which was part of the larger WISERD Civil Society project.<sup>3</sup> The context was an international situation of awareness that learning a regional or minority language at school does not translate into social use of it and a growing recognition of over-reliance on the education system in many examples of efforts to revive regional or minority languages. In a survey carried out as part of the project of 150 young people in schools or colleges teaching in Welsh, 15.5% said that they always or almost always speak Welsh at school. With regard to areas with fewer Welsh speakers, young people in the research locations in north east and south east Wales explained that there are restrictions on their ability to use Welsh socially in their areas. Some pointed out that a lack of opportunities hindered their social use of the language and contrasted with the situation in areas with a higher density of Welsh speakers where there were more opportunities to socialise in Welsh and to speak Welsh on the street. At the same time, in the areas in the east, there was a difference in the experiences of young people living on a housing estate or in a village with a higher proportion of Welsh speakers as very local circumstances affected the informal opportunities to use the Welsh language in these areas.

Many similar elements have emerged in Anne Uruska's PhD research into Welsh learners aged 16-20. Their main obstacle to using Welsh is the lack of opportunities to speak Welsh outside of school / college and there is demand for youth clubs and specific interest clubs where they can practice their Welsh. It was noted that some participants benefited from Young

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<sup>2</sup> Royles, E., Jones, R., Lewis, H. (2024). 'Methods of Assessing Linguistic Vitality Report'. Available from: [10.20391/605eb48c-05e5-44bc-96c5-83394bce046c](https://doi.org/10.20391/605eb48c-05e5-44bc-96c5-83394bce046c).

<sup>3</sup> Jones, R., Royles, E., O'Hanlon, F., Paterson, L. (2022). 'The contemporary threat to minority languages and cultures: civil society, young people and Celtic language use in Scotland and Wales' in P. Chaney and I Rees Jones (ed.) *Civil Society in an Age of Uncertainty: Institutions, Governance and Existential Challenges* (Bristol: Policy Press).

Farmers Clubs which operate in Welsh and give opportunities to socialise in Welsh or in a bilingual context. One of the findings of the work is that there more information needs to be shared about apps that are available in Welsh. Another finding is that there is scope to foster enthusiasm for the Welsh language, including training and support for teachers so that there is an enthusiastic workforce to inspire students in relation to the Welsh language.<sup>4</sup>

Wider economic factors have a significant impact on the ability to increase use of the language across Wales by increasing the number of speakers, including in areas with fewer speakers. Firstly, Ben Ó Ceallaigh understands language revival as a postmaterialist issue. He explains that a postmaterialist issue is only likely to be significant for people when their other material needs are on a solid basis, such as housing, income, health care. The implications of the housing crisis, cuts to essential public services, the cost of living crisis and the fragility of the economic situation of many of the population means that many people have bigger problems to consider than the future of the Welsh language. He argues that a situation where almost a third of Welsh children live in poverty and the way that people have had to face the serious choice between 'heating or eating' means that learning Welsh is a marginal issue for an increasing number of people compared to an economic climate where there is less austerity. If the vision of *Cymraeg 2050* is to be realised, tens of thousands more adults need to be learning Welsh to a high level of competence. Similarly, young adults who are more likely to face economic uncertainty and linked to this are time-poor, are less likely to be able to attend classes at higher levels of Welsh for adults, and there is a trend that retired people are the largest numbers in those classes.<sup>5</sup>

### Increasing confidence

#### 3. *How important is "ownership" of Welsh in terms of language acquisition, and how can this reinforce a sense of belonging to Wales and the community?*

We draw attention to three projects, two in the Basque Country and the other in Northern Ireland, where there is a growing emphasis on efforts to give a firmer basis for discussing why they speak a minority language with children and young people and elicit an idea of ownership of it.

Firstly, in the Basque Country Soziolinguistica Klusterra is working on a project to systematically integrate an understanding of sociolinguistics in the educational curriculum, further building on what is in place to expand pupils' sociolinguistic understanding and awareness. This is seen as a way of increasing young people's motivation to speak Basque and sharing linguistic, cultural, social and emotional resources with them to do so. In 2024, a report was produced laying the foundations for this and a programme was drawn up for the integration of sociolinguistics in the educational system in 2025. The intention is to incorporate learning about sociolinguistics across the whole curriculum in order to:

- increase sociolinguistic awareness
- support the development of confident Basque speakers
- encourage the use of Basque
- prepare pupils to live in a multilingual society

Initial work has been carried out to develop this agenda to date. That has drawn attention to the need to establish working groups and sub-projects, the need to work alongside strengthening linguistic fluency and cultural transfer, the importance of coordinating and

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Uruska's ongoing PhD: 'Experiences, motivation, and progression of Welsh learners between 16 and 20 years of age.'

<sup>5</sup> Ó Ceallaigh, B. (2024). 'The rising cost of living, postmaterialism, and the fate of linguistic minorities: some comments based on Irish and other Celtic contexts,' *Linguistic Minorities in Europe Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1515/lme.30889187>

liaising with other initiatives to revive the Basque language, a long-term commitment and the need for adequate funding for the development.<sup>6</sup>

Another project in the Basque Country is the work of Ane Ortega and others, included as part of the 'Equilling' project to use participatory action research to try to understand the challenges facing young people in terms of their sense of belonging to the Basque language and the lack of use of it. Focus was placed on understanding the attitudes and feelings of young people towards the Basque language. This raised issues such as who are authentic speakers of a language, the significance of understanding the experiences and feelings of these young speakers. Attention was also drawn to the implications of linguistic ability and a sense of identity to their language use, which is an important element of their ownership of it. One of the results of the project was to try to enable a change in habits and increase the use of the language by raising self-awareness and discussing young people's relationship with the language.<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, engendering a sense of belonging and ownership of the Irish language is central to the youth work carried out by the Glór na Móna and Fóram na nÓg organisations in promoting the Irish language among young people in Northern Ireland. There is an emphasis on increasing awareness of how Irish has been treated and deprived of resources and how it is a language of resistance. Emphasis is also placed on linking the language with identity and also on linking with the international situation of indigenous organisations across the world. The emphasis on a sense of belonging and ownership encourages young people to speak up and act for the Irish language and creates a sense of community among the young people that speak the language.<sup>8</sup>

These are three different methods of trying to understand and elicit a sense of belonging to a minority language among young people which show that this agenda is on the rise, and there are common characteristics between them.

In addition to this international work, the challenges associated with promoting the idea of ownership and belonging to the Welsh language in Wales need to be weighed up. The points made in response to question two above may be supplemented. Studies by Daniel Evans on Porthcawl and by Dafydd Evans on north-east Wales showed that the residents of these areas did not feel that they belonged to – or were included in – general perceptions of Welshness. These groups felt that they were excluded from a particular version of Welshness, where the ability to speak Welsh was important, and one that was geographically connected with the most western areas of the country. These studies support the need to ensure that the Welsh language, the ability to belong to it and to belong to ideas of Welshness, are promoted beyond the areas in which Welsh is most prevalent.

**4. What policies, activities or methods should be *prioritised* in order to increase the confidence of individuals/groups to use more Welsh in their everyday lives. Are there *specific challenges* in areas with a lower density of Welsh speakers?**

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<sup>6</sup> Information received by Soziolinguistika Klusterra researchers.

<sup>7</sup> Ortega, A., Gorigolzarri, J., Amorrortu, E. (2022). 'Participatory action research to promote linguistic mudas among new speakers of Basque: design and benefits,' *Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 55-67. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1968877>. See also the Equilling website: <https://www.equilling.eu/en/>

<sup>8</sup> An example is the report by Neil, G., McArdle, E. (2020). *A Model of Irish-medium youth work* available from: <https://www.glornamona.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-MODEL-IMY-2020-1UPDATED-MODEL-2020.pdf>

Again, we would like to draw attention to two initiatives in the Basque Country which seek to further develop the opportunities to use a minority language in social situations and especially in the field of sport and leisure clubs, encouraging the development of ways of working so that the clubs are a safe space to use the Basque language.

First, Euskara Kirolkide is a Sociolinguistika Klusterra project established in 2020 to create a safe space for Basque in sport, previously known as Sport D model. The aim was to try to increase the use of the Basque language in young people's leisure activities by working with six sport clubs.<sup>9</sup>

The BiKKE project by the Bizkaia provincial council has worked to reinforce the social use of the Basque language through sport. Activity includes providing grants, training in Basque and creating campaigns in collaboration with the sport federations in the area. The programme was developed to operate at three levels of basic, intermediate and advanced, including an assessment and evaluation process. The focus is on what happens within clubs in terms of the use of the Basque language in activities, oral and written communication methods, promotion and on websites and so in terms of the use of the language as a training and competition language, but also in terms of internal administration.

We have seen positive steps in Wales in terms of raising the prestige and widespread ownership of the Welsh language through some of our main sporting bodies. So far much of this activity has focused on increasing the formal status of the Welsh language, for example in social media messaging, announcements during matches and programmes. The type of developments outlined above would be further steps in this agenda and would mainstream language planning into the training and internal operation of sporting federations and down to local club level – areas which are central to the social use of language.

One of the challenges facing Welsh speakers in areas with a lower density of Welsh speakers is the lack of information about the opportunities to use Welsh. Organic use of the language cannot be relied upon, as may happen in areas with a higher density of speakers, in areas where the use of Welsh is more networked and inconsistent. There are opportunities in this context to use technology in order to enable more use of the language, for example in order to identify the shops, restaurants and so on where there are opportunities to use Welsh in a town or city. Some initial research was carried out in this area on the use of technology to identify the use of Scottish Gaelic in the city of Glasgow by Professor Bernadette O'Rourke.

### **Linguistic robustness**

*7. To what extent are witnesses aware of the concept of **taking linguistic risk**, and its effectiveness in boosting the confidence of second language learners of all abilities. Is there scope in Wales to do more of this, especially in areas with fewer Welsh speakers?*

In recent work, research was carried out into the psychological motivations of adult learners to learn Welsh, recognising the extent to which individuals' self-determination influences their decisions rather than external factors. The nature of the incentives can influence the degree of commitment and effort of individuals to learn Welsh. The perception was that there are a number of different motivations for learning Welsh. For some, the motivation is to enjoy learning Welsh, which follows on from their wider desire to learn in general. This can be a general matter of enjoying learning languages, or a more specific desire to learn more about their personal heritage, or to access culture. Other motivations include specific instrumental reasons - such as work and career opportunities, or holidays to Wales, supporting children attending Welsh-medium schools. One of the broadest themes was a sense of duty, which varied from a sense of duty to learn the Welsh language to a desire to save it as well.

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<sup>9</sup> A project managed by Jone Miren Hernandez (UPV/ EHU) in collaboration with Soziolinguistika Klusterra. See <https://euskarakirolkide.eus/en/>

In terms of how confident learners are in terms of speaking the language, many mentioned feelings of anxiety or worry about making mistakes when communicating with fluent Welsh speakers. One learner referred to uncertainty about the response that they would get when trying to do this without 'knowing that someone speaks Welsh'. As a result, they were 'anxious about starting a conversation', reducing the likelihood of using their language skills. Vocabulary issues were also mentioned. The language learned is often specific to the area and subject. A lack of familiarity with Welsh vocabulary outside the classroom hinders its wider use. It could be considered whether the teaching provides the vocabulary skills needed to use Welsh more widely in the community.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of confidence, a piece of research into teenagers from non-Welsh speaking families that learned Welsh in the education system shows that linguistic confidence is statistically a better predictor of language acquisition compared to language use. As a result of higher confidence levels, they are more likely to use the language in more 'challenging' situations and as a result have more contact with the language, develop their language skills and become more familiar with more complex language. This means that there is more confidence to use it in the community when learning a language, influencing the development of linguistic skills.<sup>11</sup>

### **Community and social use**

**9.** *To what extent is it possible to 'engineer' social use of Welsh in the community, through events and activities, especially in areas with fewer Welsh speakers.*

Note the examples above in response to question four in terms of work to develop the language in sport and leisure clubs in the Basque Country.

Note also the Eusle project that has been developed by Soziolinguistika Klusterra to influence language habits and to offer practical methods to enable change in language habits to increase the use of the Basque language. It responds to the tendency that language habits are established in a short period of time, and once they have been established, those habits are difficult to change. The project was originally implemented in workplaces in the private and public sector to change language habits within the group to increase use of the Basque language.<sup>12</sup> Eusle shows that, under the appropriate conditions, attitudes and the use of a minority language among teams of staff in workplaces can be changed. Eusle was considered a simple enough tool to increase the use of the Basque language, without incentivising sessions, classes or a large budget. A key element is that contributors voluntarily create new language habits as the intervention creates a new and different context and that they need to validate the new practice in relation to the Basque language constantly during the intervention. Eusle has also been used in various other contexts, including with young people in sport.

### **The workplace**

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<sup>10</sup> Binks, H.L & Lewis, ME, (in the process of completion). 'Why learn Welsh? Using Self Determination Theory to predict the psychological motivations of Welsh language learners.'

<sup>11</sup> Binks, H. L. & Thomas, E. M., (in the process of completion). 'Do extralinguistic factors moderate proficiency in Welsh-English Adolescent Bilinguals?'

<sup>12</sup> See Section 5, Royles, E. (2025). Arfor, workplaces and the Welsh language: good practice lessons on the impact of workplaces on regional or minority languages to support the ARFOR II programme. Available from: [10.20391/833f269f-c5b1-4a36-aeca-436697e60ffe](https://doi.org/10.20391/833f269f-c5b1-4a36-aeca-436697e60ffe). See Jauregi, P. and Suberbiola, P. (2018). 'Eusle medologia: gaztelanian finkatutako hizkuntza-ohiruretarik euskarazkoetara lan-munduan' *BAT Soziolinguistika Aldizkaraia*, 107, 97-131. Available from: <https://bat.soziolinguistika.eus/produktua/eusle-metodologia-gaztelanian-finkatutako-hizkuntza-ohituretarik-euskarazkoetara-lan-munduan/>

**13. Has there been enough focus on the workplace as a place to change linguistic behaviour in Wales, and how should policy makers try to address this.**

A number of developments have been seen in workplaces in the public sector over the past few years due to the language standards but there is scope to go a bit further to realise the potential of workplaces to influence and change linguistic behaviour in the public and private sectors and the third sector/social enterprises.

As part of this it would be useful to start by establishing a clearer understanding of the different ways in which specific jobs, or the workplaces associated with them, can influence individuals' use of the Welsh language. The question was considered in a recent online article<sup>13</sup> and it was suggested that the following categories could be used as a guide in order to consider the extent to which different jobs influence individuals' day-to-day use of the Welsh language:

- Does the job require the use of spoken or written Welsh with colleagues in order to fulfill the requirements of the job (internal working language).
- Does the job require the use of spoken or written use of Welsh with customers or people from outside the company/organisation in order to fulfill the requirements of the job (external work language).
- Does the job encourage the use of spoken or written Welsh with colleagues when discussing informal non-work-related matters (language at work).

In terms of current policies, research has shown that there is a tendency among businesses etc. to focus on the economic benefits of using the Welsh language in marketing material and on signs and creating opportunities for customers to use the Welsh language as part of that. Less focus was placed on the use of internal language in workplaces either formally (ie internal work language) or informally (ie informal work language). It is argued that the contribution of workplaces is very important in terms of the revival of a minority language in areas that have or are experiencing a language shift. Specifically, in areas where there is a tendency for young Welsh speakers to increasingly move to use English, jobs or workplaces that call for and plan the extensive use of Welsh could contribute in terms of offsetting that language shift by normalising its use in the workplace.<sup>14</sup>

In Wales, the focus is on promotion and support in the private sector and the third sector, as they do not come under the arrangements of the Language Standards unless bodies provide public services in Wales. Guidance and support are provided through the Welsh Language Commissioner for businesses and charities to develop Welsh-medium services, and they can also receive support to create a Welsh language development plan as a long-term plan to develop services in Welsh. Official recognition is provided through the 'Cynnig Cymraeg' to organisations that have created a Welsh language development plan. The report argues that there is scope to assess the support to assist and encourage organisations to develop their use of Welsh as the language of the workplace. The method of including language clauses in contracts could also be expanded and developed. There is also scope to consider the function of legal duties to develop use of the language in these sectors.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lewis, H. (2023). Creating work to support the language?, *Observatory*. Available from: <https://arsyllfa.cymru/creating-work-to-support-the-language/>

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, H. (2023). Creating work to support the language?, *Observatory*. Available from: <https://arsyllfa.cymru/creating-work-to-support-the-language/>

<sup>15</sup> Royles, E. (2025). Arfor, workplaces and the Welsh language: good practice lessons on the impact of workplaces on regional or minority languages to support the ARFOR II programme. Available from: [10.20391/833f269f-c5b1-4a36-aeca-436697e60ffe](https://doi.org/10.20391/833f269f-c5b1-4a36-aeca-436697e60ffe).

**14. Elaborating on examples of good practice and successful schemes** to develop the use of the Welsh language in the workplace, and how this could be expanded and extended to other workplaces.

In a report that discusses the use of Welsh in workplaces<sup>16</sup>, Elin Royles outlines a number of recommendations based on good practice and successful schemes in Wales and the Basque Country

Overall, the Basque Country is an example of a wide range of efforts to support the development of language planning in workplaces. Obvious examples were Bai Euskarari: an organisation that leads on a number of projects related to the promotion of Basque in the workplace, the Government's *Lanhitz programme* ('language at work') to promote the use of Basque in companies, and the Bikain certificate of excellence recognising the quality of Basque language management and initiatives to encourage innovation. This is implemented alongside legal arrangements that set out language duties in terms of using the official languages for companies or service delivery bodies. In addition, government funding is provided for various initiatives, and efforts are supported by professional advisory services on language planning that assist in setting priorities in terms of the use of Basque and its presence in the workplace in a systematic, clear and simple way, taking into account internal and managerial arrangements to enable use. All of this happens in the context of a positive discourse for the use of Basque in workplaces.

As a result, one of the report's recommendations is to develop an initiative to share good practice and therefore encourage positive action in terms of language management in Wales. Another example in Wales is the 'Leading in a Bilingual Country' programme, which provides training on culture change which addresses the psychological issues of leaders' attitudes towards the Welsh language as a way of enabling change in workplaces.

**15. The legacy of Eisteddfodau**

The WISERD Civil Society project on Education, Language and Identity looked at young people's views on attending the Eisteddfod, and Maes-B specifically. He showed that Maes-B acts as a space that can create social networks where the Welsh language is used. The response of young Welsh speakers, including an interviewee from south-east Wales, was to connect Maes-B with the idea of a large Welsh language family, which created a feeling of belonging and group identity, and that it was an example of the use of the Welsh language by young people that's established by the young people themselves. This was seen as something unusual among young people from Anglicised areas of Wales. Some of the interviewees argued that it was particularly important for young people who did not come from Welsh-speaking families, and that it's a key experience of socialising in Welsh. One interviewee from a non-Welsh speaking family explained that in secondary school she had developed more contact with friends who attended Welsh events, had started listening to Welsh music and had started attending festivals such as Tafwyl and the Eisteddfod. Overall, these events are an important part of enabling speaking Welsh socially with friends and contribute to taking

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<sup>16</sup> See Royles, E. (2025).

ownership of a minority language, as the young people themselves determine the linguistic habits rather than teachers, youth leaders etc.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jones, R., Royles, E., O'Hanlon, F., Paterson, L. (2022). 'The contemporary threat to minority languages and cultures: civil society, young people and Celtic language use in Scotland and Wales' in P. Chaney and I Rees Jones (ed.) *Civil Society in an Age of Uncertainty: Institutions, Governance and Existential Challenges* (Bristol: Policy Press).