



Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

SeneddCulture@senedd.wales

20 February 2026

Dear colleague,

Invitation to provide written evidence: ARFOR

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to help inform the Committee's scrutiny of Welsh Government Ministers and their delivery of the ARFOR programme. Our response provides a brief overview of our main impressions of the scheme's successes to date, and is based on our involvement in the programme's Llwyddo'n Lleol, Enterprising Communities and Challenge Fund workstreams.

Llwyddo'n Lleol

It should be noted that one of my officials has acted as a non-executive member of the Llwyddo'n Lleol element of the programme's steering group. Non-executive members had no influence in terms of the decisions made on the allocation of grant funding.

Llwyddo'n Lleol is a project that seeks to inspire long-term behaviour change, but with a short-term funding stream. We believe that the project has succeeded in creating content and activities that target young people from the ARFOR region in an attempt to overturn the common perception that they must leave the areas in which they grew up in order to be successful. This message is a powerful one, and the brand has been established, so we are of the opinion that the project could continue in future if there were funding for it. We believe that long-term funding for a project of this kind would increase the likelihood of delivery against the project's main objectives, and we hope that the next Welsh Government will commit to taking this step.

The project's steering group was highly inclusive, with representatives drawn from a large number of public bodies in Wales operating on a national level and in the four ARFOR

Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Siambrau'r Farchnad
5-7 Heol Eglwys Fair
Caerdydd CF10 1AT

0345 6033 221
post@comisiynyddygyymraeg.cymru
Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg

comisiynyddygyymraeg.cymru

Welsh Language Commissioner
Market Chambers
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post@welshlanguagecommissioner.wales
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counties. We understand that the intention behind the inclusion of so many bodies was to help disseminate the project's message and influence, but it is possible that a smaller group would have been more successful in providing strategic direction to this element of the ARFOR programme.

One of the project's objectives was to encourage young people who had moved away from the ARFOR area to return. Of course, we support this principle and this message, but we believe that adapting the message to encourage any Welsh speakers to move to ARFOR areas would be more inclusive and may, ultimately, be more successful.

Enterprising Communities and the Challenge Fund

As part of the agreement for the receipt of funding through these elements of the ARFOR programme, it was agreed that companies would need to receive [Cynnig Cymraeg](#) accreditation, which is recognition by the Commissioner that organisations highlight the services that they are able to provide after developing a Welsh language development plan. We were pleased to have this opportunity to collaborate with the ARFOR programme and to increase the Cynnig Cymraeg's reach. This co-ordination between Enterprising Communities, the Challenge Fund and the Cynnig Cymraeg led to 25 additional organisations providing more services through the medium of Welsh. The table below summarises the schemes that have received Cynnig Cymraeg accreditation:

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Siambrau'r Farchnad
5-7 Heol Eglwys Fair
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0345 6033 221

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Scheme	Number of organisations that received funding	The number that have received the Welsh Language Development Plan template	The number that have completed and received Cynnig Cymraeg accreditation	% that have received Cynnig Cymraeg accreditation
Enterprising Communities	65	65	18	28%
Challenge Fund	24	24	17	71%

There were inconsistencies across the counties in their methods of referring and monitoring organisations, with some counties starting the work months after others. Although not all organisations ultimately completed the Cynnig Cymraeg process, it is encouraging that every organisation has begun the process of creating a Welsh Language Development Plan. This has contributed towards ensuring that investment through Enterprising Communities and Challenge Fund grants leads to an increase in opportunities for people to use Welsh at work and when they receive services from various businesses.

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An [evaluation of ARFOR 2](#) was announced earlier this year, and the evaluation has found that the programme is successfully achieving some of its main objectives, but that consideration should also be given to targeting certain businesses and sectors in a more strategic manner. This also aligns with our own impressions. Although there are many examples of grant funding being spent on projects that are likely to have a positive effect on the use of the Welsh language, there were other examples where the investment's likely influence on the economic opportunities of Welsh speakers and on the wider use of the language was less obvious.

We believe that the programme would have benefited from a longer strategic planning phase to understand how grant funding could lead to the greatest positive impact on increasing young people's economic opportunities in the four counties, and in so doing increasing opportunities to use the Welsh language.

Decisions on grant allocations were made at the local authority level. We believe that that decision, on the one hand, ensures that decisions are made on a more local level and at a level that is, therefore, closer to the communities that the funding was intended to support. However, on the other hand, we believe that that decision led to inconsistencies in the kinds of organisations and proposals that were successful across the ARFOR region.

If a similar programme were to be run in future, we believe that it would be beneficial if strategic direction and clear instructions were provided to local authorities in terms of consistent, more strategic decision making when allocating grants. We would, therefore, be eager to see greater expertise being developed in future in order to invest in larger scale projects that have been planned more carefully and strategically so that they have the greatest possible influence on the economy and the Welsh language's viability in ARFOR areas. It should be noted that the ARFOR 2 programme's restricted timetable and limited budget did not serve to facilitate this kind of strategic, careful and long-term planning.

Connecting ARFOR activities with mainstream economic development programmes

Despite the ARFOR programme's importance, it must also be acknowledged that the related investment is very small in the context of the Welsh Government's wider economic development budget. For example, the city and growth deals provide investment worth

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billions of pounds and provide strategic direction for economic development the length and breadth of Wales over a period of 15 years. It speaks volumes that a [research report](#) by Aberystwyth University found that the Welsh language was a marginal consideration in the development of growth deals in north Wales, mid Wales and south-west Wales. According to the report, the long-term impact of the city and growth deals will be hugely significant, bearing in mind the high levels of public and private investment involved, but it appears that these initiatives do not give serious consideration to the ARFOR programme nor to the Welsh language.

Our understanding is that the contact between ARFOR officials and those involved in the city and growth deals has been very light touch in nature, if not non-existent in some areas. This is disappointing, bearing in mind that one of ARFOR's main aspirations was to understand better the link between the Welsh language and the economy, and to trial and mainstream successful interventions. In our conversations with ARFOR officials, they report that an effort has been made to co-ordinate with the city and growth deals, but that the response has been poor.

The Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities recommends that the Welsh Government should develop an economic development strategy that addresses the needs of areas of higher density linguistic significance in particular. According to the Commission, such a strategy should promote approaches to economic development that focus on the basic needs of the relevant areas. In its response to this recommendation, the Government has committed to consider this as part of the 'pause and reflect' phase of the ARFOR II programme. We believe that officials of the city and growth deals operating in areas of higher density linguistic significance should be part of any discussions on the development of specific economic development strategies for these areas. We must ensure that the city and growth deals contribute directly to the success of these economic strategies in areas of higher density linguistic significance in particular, but that they also contribute to the Welsh language's viability across all of their regions.

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Conclusions and the future of ARFOR

The ARFOR programme succeeded in convening and formulating a comprehensive programme of work very quickly after the Welsh Government stated that it would be funded, and the programme's officials are to be praised for this. The programme evaluation outlines many examples of the programme making a difference for businesses and individuals living in the ARFOR region, and this is to be welcomed.

The ARFOR programme has started to build an evidence base for the connection between the Welsh language and the economy, but additional investment is needed and additional interventions trialled to understand how best to support and strengthen the sustainability of the Welsh-speaking heartlands. The problems facing these areas are complex, which means that successful solutions to these problems are likely to be just as complex, and will be need to evolve as society evolves. We believe that the Welsh Government should commit to long-term investment to build on ARFOR's foundations.

One criticism of ARFOR that we have regularly heard is that restricting the funding to four counties excludes other areas that have a high density of Welsh speakers but are located outside the programme's current boundaries. Our view is that it would be more inclusive to co-ordinate any future funding with efforts to establish areas of higher density linguistic significance, in accordance with the main recommendations made by the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities.

We hope that the above comments will be of assistance to you in your inquiry, and I am happy for my officials to meet with you for further discussion.

Yours sincerely,

Efa Gruffudd Jones

Welsh Language Commissioner

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