

Lack of investment in the Welsh language: Welsh Government draft budget proposals for 2015-16

Response from Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Society)

1. Introduction – Cutbacks, underinvestment and lack of strategy

The percentage of Welsh Government spending that is invested in projects that specifically involve the Welsh language is very small – only 0.16% of the Government's entire expenditure. This compares very unfavourably with the Basque Country, where almost seven times the proportion of its budget is invested specifically into the language, compared to the situation here (£84 million of the 2014 regional budget).

In addition to that, our research showed a serious underinvestment within the Government's mainstream expenditure – with less than 1% of spending by programmes such as adult community learning being spent on Welsh-language activities.

According to the 2014-15 budget, spending on the Welsh language was cut from £25,076,000 in the previous year to £24,376,000 in 2014-15. A further cut to £23,511,000 is planned for 2015-16. This represents a cutback of £700,000 this year and £857,000 in 2015-16.

There were also many changes during the financial year, for example, the cutbacks of £700,000 that Welsh for Adults centres were asked to make within four weeks, on top of other cutbacks that they already had to deal with. In light of such changes it is unclear whether the cutbacks represent a 'net' loss. However, the lack of transparency and planning surrounding these decisions raises concerns about the absence of a sound financial strategy for the Welsh language. There are many examples where the percentage of Welsh-language activities being funded from the Government's mainstream expenditure could be increased.

We believe that the decisions made by the Government, even in a period of austerity, are hasty and show a lack of cross portfolio strategy regarding the budget for the Welsh-language. We believe that far better decisions could have been made if the First Minister and civil service had a clear cross portfolio strategy.

We recommend that the committee demands answers from the civil servants at the Welsh-language Unit, explaining their decisions and their failure to prepare and publish a cross portfolio assessment of the impact of expenditure on the Welsh language. Their failure to do so within 19 months raises some hefty questions that need to be answered. We believe that the Assembly should ask the Welsh Language Commissioner to take over this work.

Budget for the promotion of Welsh

In October 2013, the Welsh Government announced a cut of £1.5 million in its spending on the promotion of Welsh over two years.

Since then, we have heard muddled announcements about additional funding for the promotion of Welsh, but it is unclear whether there is any additional funding at all. According to an analysis by one of our members, it seems that the Welsh Government has cut around £2.3 million from the Welsh for Adults budget since Y Gynhadledd Fawr (the Big Conference).

It seems, therefore, that the announcements do not change the fact that only 0.16% of the Government's budget is spent on the promotion of Welsh. In the Basque Country, the investment is around seven times that amount, and this is partly responsible for the increase in Basque-speakers over the last few decades.

We believe that the Assembly should scrutinise in detail the Welsh Government's announcements, made over the last few months, on 'additional funding' for the promotion of Welsh, as well as the comparison between Wales and the Basque Country.

Furthermore, we believe that the Assembly should ensure that the promotion budget is quadrupled over a reasonable period of time.

Mainstream funding – Over 99% of investment goes to English-only activities

It is clear that there is serious underinvestment in Welsh medium activities from a number of the Government's mainstream budgets, including education and health. According to the Government, this is due to a 'lack of demand', but we believe that this shows the old-fashioned mind-set of a civil service that thinks that English services are the essential default, whereas Welsh-language services are an optional extra.

Less than £4000 out of a budget of £17 million has been spent on Welsh-language adult community learning, according to information released to us by the Welsh Government, under the Freedom of Information Act, regarding expenditure during the 2009/10 and 2011/12 financial years. Indeed, a number of the Government's main budgets fund hardly any Welsh-language provision, with over 99% of the money being spent on English provision.

According to our information, over the last three years, out of 90,477 apprenticeships funded by the Welsh Government, only 354 were through the medium of Welsh, which corresponds to fewer than four apprenticeships out of every thousand. The figures also show that only 0.02% of the £17million spent on teaching adults in the community over three years, or £2 for every £10,000, was used for Welsh medium courses. In one of the years, not a penny was spent from the budget on Welsh-medium education. Over the same period, only 0.3%, or £3 for every £1000, of expenditure on work-based learning was used to fund Welsh-medium training.

See Appendix 1 for the detailed figures.

The figures are shocking and very hard to believe. They show that the Welsh language is undermined completely in terms of the Welsh Government's mainstream funding. In reality English, one of the world's most powerful languages, is getting a massive subsidy from Welsh taxpayers. The Government's spending patterns decrease the use of Welsh and the opportunities to use it. So while the Government earmarks a relatively small amount of funding for Welsh-language enterprises, the effects of those projects on the Welsh language is completely undermined and reversed by other policies. Therefore, the Welsh Government is not operating in a coordinated way.

Living Manifesto – responding to the emergency surrounding the Welsh language

In December 2012, following the grave announcement of the Census results, we published our Living Manifesto which called for two financial changes, along with tens of other recommendations, in order to ensure the growth of the language:

"There should be a complete review of the whole expenditure of government, by an independent body such as the Welsh Language Commissioner, and an assessment of the relationship between that expenditure and the Welsh language – measuring the linguistic footprint of the expenditure."

"Considering the growth seen in the number of Basque speakers in censuses since 1991, the resources given to promote the Welsh language should be increased to the levels in that country, which means quadrupling the current expenditure in Wales."

The civil service's failure to achieve

In a meeting with the First Minister in February 2013, he agreed to conduct the review referred to above which we requested in our Living Manifesto. Since then we have seen procrastination by the civil service, which has created a great deal of paperwork, but is yet to publish any assessment.

After 18 months of waiting for the assessment to be published, and many promises, we wrote again to the First Minister, asking:

In a meeting with us on 6 February 2013, you told us that your Government would conduct an assessment of the impact on the Welsh language of every penny spent by the Welsh Government across all departments. When will this assessment be published?" [Translation of the letter from Cymdeithas yr Iaith]

We received a response stating that an assessment of the impact of budget changes on the Welsh language and other equalities was to be published, along with an Expenditure Outcome Analysis, a completely new exercise for 2014, which asked departments to identify the main expenditure programmes in their areas involving the Welsh language. No comprehensive assessment would be published, and the response stated:

"...I am sure that you will see that there will be no 'publication' as a result of this work, but rather, it is the organisation's budgeting process... Progress has been made and considerable work has been completed over the last year..." [translation of the Government's response]

Therefore, rather than a comprehensive assessment, we received a form that will be used by civil servants to make financial decisions. Therefore, by means of just a few freedom of information requests, we have succeeded in publishing more than the civil service in 19 months.

We have identified many areas of underinvestment, and we call on the Welsh Government to tackle these by increasing the percentage of funds that go towards Welsh-medium activities.

The Welsh Language Commissioner should also publish a comprehensive assessment of the impact on the Welsh language of the Welsh Government's entire expenditure across all departments.

Ignoring Y Gynhadledd Fawr – the Government ignoring its own consultation

When the First Minister announced his intention to hold a consultation on the state of the language, we welcomed the enterprise, expecting that it would lead to objective conclusions that would be acted upon. However this has not been the case.

According to the report on the conclusions of Y Gynhadledd Fawr: ¹

"One general and absolutely vital theme that emerged from contributions [was the need for the Government] to increase its financial investment in the Welsh language in order to ensure effective action." Page 8, A living language: have your say, July 2013

Instead, we have seen cuts to the budget for the promotion of Welsh and little action regarding the Government's mainstream budgets.

Danger to the independence of the Welsh Language Commissioner

We are very worried about the Welsh Government's financial power over the Welsh Language Commissioner, a body which is responsible by statute, in line with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, for managing the Welsh Government and its compliance with language duties.

It is not possible for the Commissioner to act objectively and entirely independently. Will the Commissioner be able to side with the public's language rights against a Government which cut its expenditure last year, and could continue to make further cuts at any time? The situation of the Welsh Language Commissioner is different from that of many of the other Commissioners. She has far stronger statutory powers because of the failure by many organisations to comply with their duties for decades.

There was a cut of 10% to the Commissioner's budget in 2014-2015. We understand that the Government is considering further cuts to the budget for next year. In a letter from the Deputy Director for the Welsh Language to the Commissioner in January 2014, confirming the cut, it says: *"The Welsh Government will ask for regular discussions regarding the budget with the Welsh Language Commissioner in future."*

During the period of passing the Welsh Language Measure 2011, we argued that the Commissioner's budget should be approached in the same way as the Auditor General's, a body which receives money directly from the Welsh block grant. We believe that the Assembly should legislate in order to implement the same system for the Welsh Language Commissioner in light of the very unfortunate experience in past years.

Conclusions:

Therefore, we believe that:

- the budget for the promotion of Welsh should be quadrupled to bring it closer to the levels of investment in the Basque Country;
- a longer-term budget for the Welsh language should be set out to make it possible to plan sensibly for the growth of the language;
- the Welsh Language Commissioner should be commissioned to publish a comprehensive review of the impact on the Welsh language of the Welsh Government's entire expenditure across all departments, and, having published the assessment, the Assembly should act on changes to the budget in order to ensure that a fair proportion of the Government's mainstream budgets are invested in the Welsh language;
- legislation should be introduced to ensure a fixed budget and an independent flow of funding for the Welsh Language Commissioner in order to protect the independence of the role.

Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg

¹<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/131022-a-living-language-have-your-say-en.pdf>

September 2014

Appendix 1 – Examples of negative impacts on the Welsh language within mainstream expenditure

(a) The total expenditure calculated for the work-based learning activities provided through the medium of English, Welsh and bilingually, in the period from 2009/10 to 2011/12 is shown below:

Contract year	Total expenditure on all work-based learning programmes	Expenditure calculated for all work-based learning activities provided through the medium of English	Expenditure calculated for all work-based learning activities provided through the medium of Welsh	Expenditure calculated for all work-based learning activities provided bilingually
2009/10	£119,579,654.00	£116,694,350.71	£188,925.32	£2,696,377.97
2010/11	£115,545,759.00	£111,387,106.65	£117,708.31	£4,040,944.04
2011/12	£109,373,427.00	£105,413,959.26	£412,196.21	£3,547,271.53

(b) The following table shows the total expenditure calculated for adult community learning activities provided through the medium of English, Welsh and bilingually, in the period from 2009/10 to 2011/12:

Contract year	Total expenditure on adult community learning activities	Total expenditure calculated for adult community learning activities provided through the medium of English	Total expenditure calculated for adult community learning activities provided through the medium of Welsh	Total expenditure calculated for adult community learning activities provided bilingually
2009/10	£5,684,838.00	£5,683,894.34	£943.66	£0.00
2010/11	£5,497,838.00	£5,492,697.56	£0.00	£5,140.44
2011/12	£5,684,838.00	£5,680,558.24	£2,743.94	£1,535.82

(c) The total expenditure calculated for work-based learning apprenticeship programmes provided through the medium of English, Welsh and bilingually, in the period from 2009/10 to 2011/12 is shown below:

Contract year	Total expenditure on apprenticeships	Total expenditure on apprenticeships provided through the medium of English	Total expenditure on apprenticeships provided through the medium of Welsh	Total expenditure on apprenticeships provided bilingually
---------------	--------------------------------------	---	---	---

2009/10	£78,818,839.95	£76,917,042.69	£124,526.83	£1,777,270.43
2010/11	£76,787,033.82	£74,023,361.82	£78,224.18	£2,685,447.82

(d) The following table shows the number of apprentices who followed their apprenticeship framework through the medium of English, Welsh or bilingually. Welsh language provision has been noted if at least one full framework qualification was delivered through the medium of Welsh.

Contract year	Total apprentices	English medium apprentices	Welsh medium apprentices	Bilingual apprentices
2009/10	32,550	31,635	97	818
2010/11	25,517	24,320	85	1,112
2011/12	35,928	34,522	172	1,234