



Consultation on Assisting Young People into Work

The response of Mentrau Iaith Cymru

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Mentrau Iaith Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Assisting Young People into Work.
- 1.2. Mentrau Iaith are collaborating with the Welsh Government to achieve the vision of seeing the Welsh language flourish, leading to an increase in the number and percentage of people who speak Welsh and use the language in their daily lives.
- 1.3. Mentrau Iaith do not run specific programmes to create job opportunities for young people, but we do employ young people who have Welsh language skills who work in the community.
- 1.4. Several Mentrau and Mentrau Iaith Cymru have used programmes such as Jobs Growth Wales to employ young people.
- 1.5. The Mentrau are collaborating with young people on a regular basis as part of the community activities that are organised.

2. General response to the terms of reference and the matters under discussion

- 2.1. Given that the language strategy, *A Living Language: A Language for Living*, outlines a desire to see the Welsh language flourishing, we believe that every decision made by the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government needs to benefit the Welsh language.

- 2.2. Specifically, it must be ensured that decisions involving children and young people across all sectors correspond with the aim of the Welsh Language Strategy.
- 2.3. We believe that there is a need to adopt a holistic approach when considering the challenge of assisting young people into work, through looking at the national economic situation and ensuring that all programmes, projects, strategies, Bills and activities are of benefit to the Welsh language in the long term.
- 2.4. We believe that a skill like the ability to speak Welsh is advantageous to an individual seeking work, and that there is a need to ensure that vacancies in Wales are filled by individuals who have the language skills needed for Wales to be a bilingual nation.
- 2.5. The failure to see the Welsh language as a workplace skill puts people at a disadvantage. Action needs to be taken to ensure that careers services, primary schools and secondary schools are aware of how useful this skill is and how much demand there is for it.
- 2.6. There are several examples of research that show clearly the advantages of being able to use more than one language – it is time for us to ensure that this information is shared with young people at an early enough stage in their lives for them to be able to choose to learn the language to improve their chances of employment in future.
- 2.7. There is a need for greater engagement with employers in all sectors to ensure that the skills that young people have are suitable for the workplace. Often, employers want to employ people with Welsh–language skills but are unable to find people with the necessary skills. There is demand for Welsh–language skills but a lack of skills among the workforce to do this work.

3. The extent to which employers require Welsh–language skills, and whether this requirement is perceived as a barrier by some young people.

- 3.1. First, we question why a question was asked that fundamentally casts the Welsh language in a negative light. This is not a neutral question, as it leads responses to concur with a negative statement. Response bias is accepted internationally as something that must be safeguarded against when asking people their opinions. In gathering views, questions must be asked that do not lead and influence the responder in one direction or another.

- 3.2. The way that this question has been worded is a serious matter, and one is moved to ask whether it would be considered acceptable or normal to ask the same question with regard to mathematics, literacy or any other skills. Fundamentally, this undermines the value of bilingualism as being just as valid as other skills.
- 3.3. Why is the ability to speak Welsh treated as an inferior skill and why is this question posed in a negative manner?
- 3.4. We believe that the image of Welsh as a ‘barrier’ should be changed and that it should be acknowledged as another of the fundamental skills needed to secure employment in Wales, as well as one of the core subjects in which a good qualification is required to ensure future employment.
- 3.5. We challenge the National Assembly for Wales’s Enterprise and Business Committee to change this question so that it is neutrally worded for the purposes of this consultation. Responses to the consultation will be totally worthless if questions are not asked in a neutral manner.
- 3.6. Welsh–language skills are not barriers but open doors to employment opportunities.
- 3.7. In our opinion, more employers would request Welsh–language skills if they were to see the benefits of having someone with these additional skills in their workplaces.
- 3.8. There have been several recent reports on the Welsh language and the economy (see the appendix for specific references), and the general consensus is that the Welsh language can have a positive influence on the Welsh economy and that it is possible to develop employment opportunities in tandem with support for the Welsh language.
- 3.9. The Welsh Language Measure states that the Welsh language has official status in Wales and Welsh–language standards will impose a duty on local authorities to promote the use of Welsh.
- 3.10. As a result, there will be increasing demand for Welsh–language services, which will, in turn, increase the demand for people with Welsh–language skills to work bilingually.

4. How effective is the range of schemes, initiatives and projects aimed at supporting young people into work, for example: Jobs Growth Wales; apprenticeships; traineeships; other projects supported by

European funding; and third-sector-run projects? Do they provide good value for money?

- 4.1. Welsh-language services: From our experience of the Jobs Growth Wales scheme, the quality of the service provided varies, including some negative experiences of not being able to operate through the medium of Welsh.
- 4.2. There are several cases of Jobs Growth Wales providers failing to provide Welsh-language forms and difficulties in advertising job opportunities in Welsh. It appears that, in some cases, lack of awareness of the availability of Welsh-language forms, operational processes through the medium of Welsh and the duty to provide services in Welsh are the root causes of the difficulties experienced.
- 4.3. If the experience of using the scheme is not a positive one for an employer, what kind of experiences are the most important customers, namely the young people, having? We are not confident that the services stemming from these schemes are going to improve in future through mainstreaming the Welsh language alone, and we believe that there is a need for schemes that operate through the medium of Welsh and that have the Welsh language as a core component.

5. Alternative schemes for assisting people into work

- 5.1. There are other potential schemes for assisting young people into work, and we believe that it is important to be open to new ideas and pursue innovative schemes that will make a difference.
- 5.2. One current project that has been developed, which has received support from several quarters, is the Welsh Labour Market Scheme.
- 5.3. The scheme is a socio-economic strategy to give the Welsh language a more robust basis by:
 - Using the Welsh language as an economic trigger
 - Reducing out-migration
 - Recognising the demand for Welsh-medium services
 - Expanding services through the medium of Welsh
 - Coupling demand with employment and training opportunities
 - Identifying economic opportunities
- 5.4. The scheme has been acknowledged in reports and promoted as a good example of blending economic benefits and the Welsh language. The

scheme responds to several challenges and corroborates the findings noted in the following documents:

- *Welsh language skills needs in eight sectors (April 2014)*
- *Regional Delivery Plan for Employment and Skills for South West and Central Wales (2014)*
- *A living language: a language for living (2012)*
- *Report of the Welsh Language and Economic Development Task and Finish Group (January 2014)*
- *A Review of the work of Mentrau Iaith, Language Action Plans and the Aman Tawe Language Promotion Scheme (January 2014)*
- *Report: increasing the number of communities where Welsh is the main language (December 2013)*
- *Report: One language for all (May 2014)*
- The Economic Prioritisation Framework for Welsh European Funds

- 5.5. We believe that it is time to see the Welsh language as an economic trigger that will be of benefit to everyone – there is nothing negative about this idea.
- 5.6. The scheme fits in with key European grants, which means that, with the Welsh Government’s support, it would be possible to draw down substantial funds from Europe to implement the scheme and transform employment in Wales.
- 5.7. We are more than happy to share further details of the Welsh Labour Market Scheme.

Contact details

Mentrau Iaith Cymru

Y Sgwâr, Llanrwst

LL26 0LG

post@mentrauiath.org