

INTRODUCTION

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.

It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.

The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales - Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESP).

In drafting this response the WLGA has worked in partnership with ADEW (the Association of the Directors of Education in Wales) and specifically with the ADEW Inclusion Group.

Consultation questions

Question 1 - What are your views on whether Welsh in Education Strategic Plans are contributing to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's overarching Welsh Medium Education Strategic Plan?

All local authorities are committed to developing the Welsh language and there is goodwill towards the language across Welsh authorities.

The **Welsh Government's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** is a comprehensive and specific document that defines the government's vision clearly and links very well with **Iaith Pawb** (2003). Despite this, the document is out of date as it talks about things that are no longer in existence such as the School Effectiveness Framework. In addition, some other significant developments have occurred since its publication.

A local authority's **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** (WESP) should be an influential and powerful document that achieves the outcomes and targets set by the Welsh Government. Welsh Government guidance keeps local authorities' focus on strategic aims and objectives. The plan approval process is thorough and challenging.

- The template for creating a plan is long and complex. Carmarthenshire's plan has 66 pages, and so it is possible to lose sight of the main priorities. The plan creation is complicated because of the different linguistic nature and educational structures across counties. Therefore, is one template/format really suitable for all? Would it not be more suitable for a local authority to use the existing local business planning arrangements supported by the council's corporate structures?

- A better system for discussing and sharing practice at strategic level would ensure consistency of content and expectation across Wales. Is the Welsh Government expecting more from some local authorities and setting higher targets? This would also facilitate a closer relationship between the plans of different authorities/consortia.

The responses that all councils have submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner on **Language Standards** will be helpful in this regard, also.

If you believe that WESPs are not contributing sufficiently, how do you think this could be resolved?

Every plan needs to reflect **Welsh Government's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** and be ambitious about Welsh medium education. Every local authority can play its part.

There should be clearer guidance on how the **WESP Forum** is to be developed, with an opportunity afterwards for local interpretation.

The funding difficulties in local authorities make it challenging to implement WESP targets leading to a loss of focus on the requirements of the Welsh Government's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. There have been cuts in the RSG over a period and, therefore, all local authorities must prioritize expenditure. **DEDICATED FINANCE SHOULD BE OBTAINED WITH CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO FUNDING A WESP LEAD OFFICER IN ALL CONSORTIA AND AUTHORITIES as in Carmarthenshire.**

The strategy's implications have not taken into consideration the range of Welsh medium education provision models across the country, i.e. there is no one way of suiting every local authority and consortium. **FREEDOM TO DEVELOP LOCAL RESPONSES FOR IMPLEMENTING AND ACHIEVING WELSH GOVERNMENT AIMS.**

Question 2 - What are your views on whether WESPs are (or have the potential) to deliver the required change at a local authority level (for example delivering provision to meet any increased demand for Welsh medium education)?

There is a challenge for local authorities as regards prioritizing and funding all necessary developments. At the moment, there is an obvious focus on raising standards, improving teaching and learning, developing leadership, preparing for change in special education legislation and consortia working.

Welsh development is evidently a high priority for local authorities but because of local government's situation, it is lower on the list of priorities in some areas.

The main challenge facing some councils is how to satisfy the demand for Welsh

medium education. Work to measure that demand draws parents' attention to the benefits of being bilingual and forces some councils to consider the demand and act accordingly. Despite this, the legal process does not particularly help in increasing the provision if statutory change in a school's character is needed.

The WESP goes some way towards facilitating changes as regards providing for an increase in Welsh medium education. Despite this, it would be beneficial for the Welsh Government to provide a system for measuring demand to address this challenge. *Is there an existing good practice that can be shared?*

At national level, it would be helpful to develop a locally adaptable package of materials which market the benefits of bilingual education. At present, all local authorities are working individually. A leaflet for teachers to assist in discussions with parents would be useful, as well as pamphlets conveying the main messages to parents.

If you believe that WESPs are not, or don't have the potential, to deliver change, how do you think this could be resolved?

The plan refers to moving schools along the language continuum. The system of being forced to close and reopen schools to change their language status along the continuum is restrictive. This is required when changing the language status of a class, also.

Although the Welsh Government approves authorities' plans, its other branches and legislation do not facilitate our work, e.g. changing the linguistic character or nature of a school is a long, complicated process of consultation etc.

The Welsh Government and/or ESTYN needs to develop an effective, successful system of sharing good practice. In annual reports for the Welsh Government's Welsh Medium Education Strategy, attention is paid to what the government has done without mentioning case studies that record effective/good practice in the local authorities.

Question 3 - What are your views on the arrangements for target setting; monitoring; reviewing; reporting; approving; and ensuring compliance with delivering the requirements for WESPs (and the role of the local authority and the Welsh Government in this regard)?

The arrangements are suitable and specific, on the whole. The monitoring and reporting system ensures that plans are current and specific, encouraging every local authority to continually focus on them. This could be seen as duplication of work however, as the **WESP Forum** is available to do this locally.

The system is suitable in counties where the roles of Welsh and English medium schools are clear, but the target-setting arrangements create problems in those counties with schools that do not provide education through the medium of only one language – i.e. dual stream/bilingual schools.

In addition, it is easy to design transfer targets in some authorities, e.g. setting a target for progression is easy in situations where families decide that the children start Welsh medium education at three years of age and continue with it until the end of their time at school. It is more complicated in those counties where there is a range of linguistic provision in the secondary education sector.

The monitoring/reporting should be concise and useful as well as focussing on the main aims, which should be reasonable.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Question 4 - What are your views on whether WESPs evidence the effective interaction between the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium education strategy and other relevant policies and legislation*?

(*for example school transport policy; 21st Century Schools programme; A living language: a language for living – Moving forward policy statement; Flying Start; planning policy)

Working within regulations and responding to the requirements of different Welsh Government departments is difficult at times. It is not evident that every department attaches the same importance to the Welsh language when conveying or writing policies. The same could also be said of county council departments.

It would be good if all departments could cooperate for successful linguistic progression and support local authority officers who are responsible for implementing WESP recommendations.

The recommendations of the Donaldson Report, **SUCCESSFUL FUTURES**, are encouraging, and their implementation would strengthen the position of Welsh in education, but it must be ensured that all recommendations are implemented and realized.

Welsh Government officials' support would be useful when parents challenge developments and decisions arising from WESP in local authorities. More often than not, the advice given harms the process and either slows down the change or forces the local authority to abandon it.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

It would be of benefit if Welsh Government leaders were to take every opportunity of stating their commitment to the vision clearly and publicly – **An education and training system that responds in a planned way to the increasing demand for Welsh medium education, that reaches and reflects our diverse communities, and ensures that there is an increase in the number of people of all ages and backgrounds who are fluent in Welsh and can use it with their families, in their communities and at work.**

Suitable investment for employing officers to lead/support work and finance for preparing language support materials.

Time for local and national harmonizing would also be beneficial.

The main training grant is now distributed to clusters of schools and so Welsh medium training must compete for attention with other priorities.

Question 5 - What are your views on whether the outcomes of WESPs deliver equal outcomes for all pupils, including for example, primary/secondary pupils or children from low income households.

On paper, every Welsh in Education Strategic Plan commits to ensuring that there will be fair outcomes for all pupils. In spite of this, there are challenges:

- Ensuring that there is standard linguistic provision to support all pupils, especially in the special needs sector.
- Ensure that there is a workforce with bilingual provision skills.
- Coordinate education provision with other initiatives such as Welsh for Adults and community developments.

Often, school staff (heads and teachers) do not explain the advantages of being bilingual to parents.

If you believe that the outcome of WESPs do not deliver equal outcomes, how do you think this could be resolved?

- Investment in the workforce with the aim of developing effective bilingual practitioners for all schools. The only way of developing Welsh as a second language and of providing for additional learning needs in Welsh is to have a ready supply of competent staff.
- Challenge of employing support staff with suitable bilingual skills.
- Coordinate services more effectively, ensuring that each service or agency supporting the Welsh language collaborates.

- Write an information pack for schools to assist with the discourse on benefits of bilingual education.
- Need for investment in a teachers' language skill development programme as a number of staff fall between two stools (Cwrs Sabothol/Gloywi Iaith). Need to provide at intermediate level, concentrating on Welsh medium teaching skills.

Question 6 - If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be?

Facilitate the process of moving schools along the language continuum.

The process of changing schools' language category is challenging.

Question 7 - Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered by the specific questions?

- Must work towards sharing good practice and look beyond Wales regarding how to promote and maintain a bilingual education system.
 - Must promote the advantages of bilingualism nationally and dispel myths.
 - Must help our pupils to take pride in the language and ensure that Welsh is not just a language to be used in the classroom.
 - Need to work better with partners (mentrau, Trywydd etc.) and find out which support and expertise is available.
 - On-line resource library to promote Welsh.
 - Newly qualified teachers' language standards - need to collaborate more closely with providers.
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