



Menter a Busnes Committee
National Assembly for Wales

29/05/2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Discussion on the Welsh Government's Co-investment in Skills Framework

The Welsh Language Commissioner's comments on the Welsh Government's Co-investment in Skills Framework can be summarised as follows:

- *Employers must be encouraged to support Welsh language skills training. The principle of joint investment should be promoted across the sectors where the greatest demand is seen for Welsh language skills, as well as other sectors that are not traditionally associated with the Welsh language.*
- *At the same time, it should be ensured that this is done alongside promoting positive viewpoints among employers towards the economic value of the Welsh language; and that funding arrangements are flexible enough to develop and strengthen the commitment of employers to provide and increase the level of training.*
- *The Welsh Language Commissioner has submitted advice and evidence to the Welsh Government outlining the scope and significance of the link between the Welsh language and economic development in general, and offers specific comments regarding the potential of the European Social Fund (ESF) to promote the Welsh language as a skill for the workplace across Wales.*

The Welsh Language Commissioner welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation. The principal aim of the Welsh Language Commissioner in the exercise of her functions is to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. In so doing, the Commissioner will try to increase the use of Welsh in the provision of services, and through other opportunities. The Commissioner will also address the official status of the Welsh

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language in Wales and the statutory duties to use Welsh through the imposition of standards.

Two principles underpin the work of the Commissioner namely

- that the Welsh language should be treated no less favourably than the English language in Wales, and
- that persons in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of Welsh if they choose to do so.

One of the Commissioner's strategic objectives is to influence the consideration given to the Welsh language in policy developments. Therefore the Commissioner's main role is to provide comments in accordance with this remit and to act as an independent advocate on behalf of Welsh speakers in Wales. This approach is employed to avoid any potential compromise of the Commissioner's regulatory functions and should the Commissioner wish to conduct a formal review of individual bodies' performance in accordance with the provisions of the Measure.

Accordingly, comments are submitted below in relation to two of the committee's questions.

Will employers engage with the principle of co-investment? Are levels of training likely to increase or decrease as a result?

Should any additional training be exempt from co-investment, for example, for new start-up businesses?

The Welsh Government's Co-investment in Skills Framework states clearly a desire to move the emphasis away from a system of investment in skills led by the government to a system led and influenced by employers. Attention is drawn to an increase in the percentage of the workforce receiving training, from 56% in 2011 to 62% in 2013, and it is suggested that these results indicate the continuous willingness and commitment of some employers to develop the skills of their workforce.

In this context, the Commissioner wishes to draw attention to the findings of the report entitled Welsh Language Skills Needs in Eight Sectors (2014).

- The report submitted some findings regarding qualifications and training to develop Welsh language skills. According to the report only **four per cent** of organisations across the eight sectors that had funded or arranged training during the previous 12 months had planned it specifically to develop Welsh language skills.
- Comparatively high percentages of local government, central government, charity and voluntary organisations noted the desire to arrange training to develop Welsh language skills, but only **two per cent** of organisations seeking to make profits expressed the same level of willingness.



- Among the reasons for not seeking to increase the Welsh language skills of staff through training, 30 per cent of organisations that had difficulties in finding appropriate Welsh language training courses stated that the **training was too costly**. More strikingly, the most common reason given by respondents for not providing Welsh language skills training was **that increasing the levels of Welsh language skills had not been a priority for the organisation** (62 per cent).

The Commissioner would also like to draw attention to the responses to a consultation by the Welsh Government in 2014, 'Balancing the responsibilities for skills investment: proposals for co-investment in post-19 skills'. A number of respondents to that consultation emphasised that co-investment in Welsh language skills should be encouraged in the sectors where the demand is greatest. Respondents also emphasised that **consideration should be given to either not adopting the co-investment model in the context of developing Welsh language skills, or to limit the move in that direction** (e.g. by investment on a sliding scale) **in relation to funding the development of the Welsh language skills of the workforce**. Respondents to that consultation consistently underlined the importance of offering a financial incentive in order to encourage commitment to language skills training by employers. These conclusions are mirrored in the funding of Welsh for Adults, which, as outlined in the Framework is funded by the Government - and not through co-investment.

The Commissioner believes it is important to encourage employers to support Welsh language skills training in considering the objectives of the Welsh Government's Strategy for the Welsh Language, '*A Living Language, a Language for Living: Moving Forward.*' By providing training to improve the Welsh language skills of their staff, organisations can not only respond to their own business requirements but also contribute towards achieving objectives such as increasing the numbers of Welsh speakers and increasing use of the Welsh language in the workplace. Therefore more co-investment in language skills training should be proactively promoted and encouraged, especially in those sectors where the greatest demand for Welsh language skills is seen, such as Care, Agri-Food and Creative Industries, as well as the other sectors not traditionally associated with the Welsh language.

It is vital to ensure that a move away from Government-led investment in skills to a system led and influenced by employers does not limit the opportunities for Welsh language skills training. Although the framework in question draws attention to the increasing desire of employers to provide training for their staff, it is seen that limited acknowledgement of the value of the Welsh language as a skill, as well as financial considerations, are likely to prevent at least some employers from providing Welsh language skills training. Also, the results of the 'Balancing the responsibilities...' consultation indicate that the attitude of employers towards co-investing in Welsh language skills training is not always positive. Considering these viewpoints, it is possible that adopting the co-investment model in relation to the development of Welsh language skills would not encourage employers to increase existing training levels.



If it is proposed to promote the co-investment model in the context of Welsh language skills training, it should therefore be ensured:

- that it is done alongside promoting and encouraging positive attitudes among employers towards the economic value of the Welsh language;
- that the funding arrangements are flexible enough to develop and strengthen the commitment of employers to provide and increase training levels.

Use of European Funding

The Welsh Language Commissioner has submitted advice to Welsh Government Ministers regarding the importance of the Welsh language in relation to European programmes such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Rural Development Fund 2014-2020. The report acknowledges the scope and significance of the link between the Welsh language and economic development, and a copy of the report is enclosed for your attention.

The European Social Fund (ESF) offers particular opportunities to realise the objectives of '*A Living Language, a Language for Living: Moving Forward*' in relation to the value of the Welsh language as a skill for the workplace across Wales. This programme offers an opportunity for strategic, long-term investment in order to:

- respond to the requirements of employers, developing and organising full-time, part-time and short Welsh language skills training tailored towards specific needs - in collaboration with higher and further education institutions;
- work towards changing the attitudes of employers by strengthening the relevance and value of Welsh language skills to employers across Wales and within specific sectors (such as Food and Health Sciences; Tourism and Leisure; Creative Industries and the Culture Sector; Low Carbon, Energy and Environment; ICT and Digital Economy)
- make full use of skills and expertise already available by linking employers with individuals who have relevant Welsh language skills, especially within sectors in which it has proved difficult to recruit Welsh speakers;



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- define and encompass Welsh language skills needs and skills training to ensure further planning based on full evidence.

I trust the committee finds these comments useful.

Yours truly,

Meri Huws
Welsh Language Commissioner

