

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i Gynlluniau Strategol Cymraeg mewn Addysg | Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans

WESP 41

Ymateb gan : UCAC (Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru)

Response from : UCAC (Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru)

### 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?

It's difficult to say whether they're contributing to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Medium Education Strategic Plan. The important question is, 'What happens if the Plans aren't realised?'

The promotion of bilingualism and Welsh-medium education is very important to UCAC. Our experience of responding to consultations about the plans when they were published was very difficult. With 22 local authorities publishing plans and, often, no clarity as to where the relevant documents might be found, and the fact that everyone needed the responses at around the same time, the workload was very heavy.

Some of the plans set out an ambitious vision while others aren't ambitious enough. At times, there were high ambitions but I was aware of considerable HR challenges at the LAs in question in terms of realising that vision and meeting the targets.

Also, the problems around funding transport for pupils aged under 4 and over 16 years old to attend Welsh-medium education are already undermining continuity from one stage to the next.

With substantial costs, e.g. £1.75 per day for school transport, this means that parents will pay hundreds of pounds a year for one child to be transported to school. There is no case to support this - it's just a way for LAs to make money - there are clearly empty seats on the buses already and the presence of more children won't increase the cost of the bus.

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

Workforce planning methods need to be improved to ensure that there are enough fluent and confident bilingual speakers at all levels, e.g. teaching assistants, teachers, school leaders, consultants, ALN experts etc.

Ensure that transport funding problems don't affect parents' choice for the next stage of their children's education. Whatever the financial situation, transport needs to be funded fairly.

Better use could be made of immersion centres for latecomers in some LAs, following the pattern used in Gwynedd. Some other LAs use language centres, but it can be very frustrating for those teachers working hard to try to ensure that children become fluent when they only see them 1½ - 3 days a week, as opposed to 5 days a week for a term. This restricts the child's bilingual development.

## 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)?

No. In our opinion the plans don't ensure the necessary changes in LAs.

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

Once again, there's a need for investment in appropriate transport and investment in the workforce. Changes to transport policies are a threat to Welsh-medium education, especially where pupils come from a disadvantaged background. Transport problems are a barrier to education.

Investment is needed in the workforce and their skills need to be improved. There are sabbatical courses available, but the number of staff gaining a place on such courses is low, e.g. 6 teachers and 6 assistants a year from one LA. Individuals are sometimes keen but because of curriculum requirements, the school might be unwilling to release them - worries about short-term problems affecting long-term planning.

The vision needs to be communicated to the entire workforce, and sometimes work will be needed to change attitudes. It needs to be ensured that teachers and those affected by the Plans are fully aware of their content. Teachers work to meet the targets but aren't always aware of the content.

The fact that the information is only published electronically causes problems:

everything available or shared electronically. How many get the information, open the e-mail, open the attachment? How many read on-screen (and give up half way through), how many of them print out these lengthy documents?

Effective communication is crucial.

### 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)?

We would think, considering that there are 22 of these Strategic Plans, that they create a considerable workload for LAs and WG officials.

There's a danger of it being a paper exercise; where boxes are ticked to say that things are available, but there's no real impact on the Welsh language and Welsh-medium education within LAs.

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)

Transport: see the above comments on changes to transport policies. Travel problems can also be challenging in various ways. As well as what has already been noted, the location of a school can be problematic in terms of ensuring that pupils can take part in activities. When pupils have to travel to get a Welsh-medium education, the distance can be a disadvantage. When there are practice sessions after school – there may not be a good enough public transport system available, especially in rural areas, so that children can easily travel home after events or practice sessions. Many children attending the nearest English-medium school can usually walk home.

When schools and colleges share staff, or children change campus because of a lack of Welsh-medium provision, this can also create challenges.

21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools: educational reorganisation can cause problems when schools merge and move down a category. Any reorganisation should only move schools forward in terms of their Welsh-medium provision.

More needs to be done to educate parents about the advantages of bilingualism (see the recommendations by Professor Donaldson in 'Successful Futures'). An LA will sometimes face great opposition from some parents if it moves a school forward in terms of language provision as part of its reorganisation process.

Planning policy: planning policy needs to be looked at but it seems that neither local authorities nor the Welsh Government are addressing this matter in the context of the impact on education provision and the Welsh language. The implications of permitting large housing developments (with hundreds of houses) need to be taken into consideration, in terms of the impact on local schools and the Welsh language. What about the LA's ability to provide immersive education, aftercare and an education workforce that can provide linguistic continuity? Yes, people need affordable housing in their communities but many of the houses being built now are 4-5 bedroom houses, which are targeted at families.

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

Ensure / protect funding for transport including transport to Welsh-medium education for pupils under 4 years old and over 16 years old.

Ensure that LAs must consider the impact on the Welsh language, the provision of Welsh-medium education and immersive education when considering planning applications.

Ensure that every school reorganisation plan shows progression in terms of the linguistic continuum.

## 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.

No. We don't believe that every child gets fair access to the Welsh language and Welsh-medium education. Opportunities vary according to the LA, so there is inconsistency across Wales. Where there are transport funding problems, this is more likely to affect children from low-income households, and further exclude them from their right to a Welsh-medium education.

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

The process of drafting a Plan, then monitoring, reviewing and reporting on it, approving and complying with various requirements must lead to substantial work in terms of monitoring each plan. We believe it's important to have a Plan that requires each LA to develop and improve Welsh-medium provision and education, but it's important to ensure that more attention is paid nationally and locally to education workforce planning.

The implications of Professor Donaldson's report, 'Successful Futures', and the report by Professor Sioned Davies, 'One Language for All', also need to be considered now, and the impact on the Welsh Government's vision for the Welsh language.

There's also the question of what the next steps would be if a local authority fails to achieve what's set out in its plan.

## 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?

Immersive education of the highest standard needs to be available in every LA, following the pattern set by Gwynedd.

We believe it's important that the Plans don't become a paper exercise, allowing LAs and the Welsh Government to simply tick boxes in terms of language provision.

## Question 7

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

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