

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau/ Economy, Infrastructure and Skills  
Committee  
Prentisiaethau yng Nghymru 2017 / Apprenticeships in Wales 2017  
Ymateb gan Comisiynydd y Gymraeg / Evidence from Welsh Language  
Commissioner



Mr Russell George AM  
Chair of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
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02/05/2017

Dear Chair,

### **Apprenticeships in Wales 2017**

When I wrote to you on 11 April regarding the terms of reference of the above investigation, I stated that I intended to share the evidence I have regarding the use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes; and the main factors which influence the take-up of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.

### **Background**

The Welsh Language Commissioner welcomes the opportunity to comment on the inquiry. 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 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.

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One of the Commissioner's strategic objectives is to influence the consideration given to the Welsh language in policy developments. This is done by providing 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 the remit of the inquiry.

### **The quality of the data available**

There is very little data available publicly on the use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes. We know from the [Lifelong Learning Wales Record](#) how many work-based learning activities were completed in Welsh, bilingually or with an element of Welsh since 2003/04. We note that this data relates to work-based learning activities and *not* apprenticeships specifically. The majority of work-based learning programmes are apprenticeship programmes (76 per cent last year, and 74 per cent in 2014/15), therefore this data is an indicator of the use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes.

In terms of apprenticeship programmes specifically, we know the number of programmes which included learning activities in Welsh, bilingually or with an element of Welsh between 2011/12 and 2014/15. This information comes from a [freedom of information request](#) (12 May 2016), but this information is not published or updated on websites such as the Lifelong Learning Wales Record.

The above data shows the number of Welsh and bilingual learning activities and programmes by type and qualification level *only*. It would be useful to be able to analyse the Welsh and bilingual provision data across the same fields used to analyse other data on work-based learning and apprenticeship programmes e.g. based on study subject, age group and the learner's domicile authority region.

**The public data regarding the use of Welsh within work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships in particular is limited and patchy.**

### **The use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes – the current situation**

Firstly, it must be highlighted that the method for categorizing and recording the use of Welsh in work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships specifically has



changed since 2014/15. Since 2014/15, the activities' language medium is defined solely by the language of assessment. Also, a new category ('some bilingual learning') is used to record learning activities that include some elements in Welsh, but are assessed mainly or completely in English. This means that care must be taken when comparing data before and after 2014/15. It is possible, for example, that the new exclusive focus on the assessment language from 2014/15 onwards provides a more accurate picture of the use of Welsh within the programmes in question. Also, we only have two years of data recorded using the new system.

Bearing this in mind, the data shows the following:

- The percentage of work-based learning activities conducted in Welsh or bilingually is very low. Since 2011/12, on average only **3 per cent** of work-based learning activities were categorised as being bilingual; and only **0.3 per cent** have been conducted in Welsh. Last year (2015/16) 162,480 work-based learning activities were assessed. Of those, 5,045 (3.1 per cent) were assessed bilingually; and 685 (0.4 per cent) in Welsh only.
- The data shows that since 2014/15 some of the assessments conducted included 'some Welsh'. In 2015/16 there was some element of Welsh in 8,085 assessments – that is **5 per cent** of all learning activities.
- The data relating to apprenticeships specifically paints a similar picture. Between 2011/12 and 2014/15 nearly **96 per cent** of apprenticeships on average were completed in English only. In 2014/15 around **5 per cent** of programmes included at least one learning activity in Welsh or bilingually, but again, only **0.3 per cent** of activities were completed in Welsh only.

**The use of Welsh within work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships specifically is very low. Over the last few years, there has been no significant increase in the number or percentage of those who learn and are assessed in Welsh and bilingually.**

We are aware of some factors that are likely to prevent an increase, although the evidence regarding these factors is patchy. The difficulties in increasing the use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes include:

- **A lack of demand from learners.** Employer and providers believe that the low demand for Welsh-medium and bilingual apprenticeships is one of the main



factors at the heart of the current situation.<sup>1</sup> According to the *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales Survey* in 2014 and 2015, only one in ten of those learners who were offered the option of studying in Welsh or bilingually said that they would like to take that opportunity.<sup>2</sup> In 2014/15 and 2015/16, Estyn noted that very few learners choose to write assessments in Welsh.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that the low demand from learners stems to a degree from a lack of confidence in their linguistic skills; and from the belief that the Welsh language is not an asset in the workplace.<sup>4</sup>

- **A lack of an active offer.** In 2013, Estyn noted that ‘many providers do not analyse learners’ Welsh language needs well enough and not all providers encourage Welsh-speaking learners to undertake training and assessment in Welsh’.<sup>5</sup> According to the findings of the *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales Survey* fewer than half of the learners in the work-based learning sector were offered the opportunity to learn in Welsh or bilingually in 2014 and 2015.<sup>6</sup> When publishing self-assessment guidelines for post-16 providers in 2016, the Welsh Government noted that ‘providers should be evaluating how well they address these issues’.<sup>7</sup>
- **A lack of assessors.** The report *Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-14: Apprenticeships - Revised* noted that many providers have insufficient numbers of bilingual assessors. According to the evaluation, this had implications for the types of training that was on offer to learners. Also, there were occasions when some providers had to refer learners to other providers, as they did not have bilingual assessors in specific subjects.<sup>8</sup>
- **Size of the provision.** There are conflicting messages regarding the adequacy of Welsh-medium and bilingual apprenticeship programme provision. According to Estyn's annual reports for 2014/15 and 2015/16 the opportunities for learners

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, *Welsh-medium Education Strategy: Annual Report 2014/15* (July 2015), p. 9; York Consulting, Old Bell 3, IFF Research and Cardiff University, *Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-14: Apprenticeships - Revised* (Welsh Government Social Research, 29 June 2016), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics for Wales, *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales survey results, 2014* (17 April 2014).

<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2014/140417-post-16-learner-voice-wales-survey-2014-en.pdf>

Statistics for Wales, *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales survey results, 2015* (21 April 2015).

<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/150421-post-16-learner-voice-wales-survey-2015-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Estyn, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014-2015* (2015), p. 94; Estyn, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015-2016* (2016), p. 112 and 114.

<sup>4</sup> York Consulting, Old Bell 3, IFF Research and Cardiff University, *Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-14: Apprenticeships - Revised* (Welsh Government Social Research, 29 June 2016), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Estyn, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2012-2013* (2013), p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics for Wales, *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales survey results, 2014* (17 April 2014).

<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2014/140417-post-16-learner-voice-wales-survey-2014-en.pdf>

Statistics for Wales, *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales survey results, 2015* (21 April 2015).

<http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/150421-post-16-learner-voice-wales-survey-2015-en.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government, *Self-assessment guidance for post-16 providers* (July 2016), p. 7

<http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160707-sar-guidance-en.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> York Consulting, Old Bell 3, IFF Research and Cardiff University, *Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-14: Apprenticeships - Revised* (Welsh Government Social Research, 29 June 2016), p. 74.



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to receive training and be assessed in Welsh have increased compared to provision in the past.<sup>9</sup> When responding to the Welsh Government consultation 'Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy' (July 2015) many respondents believed that sufficient provision for Welsh-medium apprenticeships was already available but that more needed to be done to promote it more widely. At the same time, 73 per cent of respondents to a specific version of this consultation for young people were of the opinion that there should be more Welsh-medium apprenticeships.<sup>10</sup>

**Different factors can influence the use of Welsh within work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships specifically, including a lack of demand from learners; a lack of an active offer of Welsh-medium or bilingual provision; a lack of bilingual assessors; and the extent of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.**

Work-based learning programmes such as apprenticeships are vital in order to ensure continuity from education into the workplace as opportunities to use the language. This in turn is essential in order to create a bilingual workforce that can serve a bilingual population. In my letter to you on 11 April I voiced my concerns regarding the lack of consideration given to the Welsh language in the review of apprenticeship programmes in Wales and that this is a barrier to identifying the strengths and weaknesses in current provision and ensuring progress in the coming years. I trust that the above highlights the need to give specific attention to the situation of the Welsh language within these programmes and to consider how to improve the situation in the years to come.

Yours sincerely,

**Meri Huws**

The Welsh Language Commissioner

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<sup>9</sup> Estyn, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014-2015* (2015), p. 94; Estyn, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015-2016* (2016), p. 112 and 114.

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government, *Consultation – summary of the responses. Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy* (July 2015), p. 13-14 <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/consultation/150701-sor-en.pdf>