

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Materion Allanol a Deddfwriaeth Ychwanegol | External Affairs and
Additional Legislation Committee
Gwydnwch a pharodrwydd: ymateb gweinyddol ac ariannol Llywodraeth Cymru i
Brexit| Resilience and preparedness: the Welsh Government's administrative and
financial response to Brexit
EAAL(5) RPB06
Ymateb gan Comisiynydd y Gymraeg | Evidence from Welsh Language
Commissioner

I would like to emphasise the following points:

The economic implications of the UK's exit from the European Union for Welsh speakers and Welsh-speaking communities are a cause for concern. Among other implications, Brexit could:

- undermine the provision of programmes and projects in Wales that are fundamental to creating skilled bilingual workforce and supporting the use of Welsh in the community and in business; and
- Impact on economic sectors that are important to Welsh speakers and to a large extent sustain Welsh-speaking communities.

It is absolutely essential that Brexit does not undermine the efforts to create more Welsh speakers or to increase the use made of the Welsh language.

I welcome the clear commitment of the Welsh Government to safeguard rural areas where the Welsh language is strongest from any detrimental effects of Brexit on the agricultural sector. However, as the process of leaving the EU continues, I believe it is essential that its impact on the Welsh language receives due consideration in all aspects of the work of the Government.

In that regard, I would argue that the extent of the economic impact of Brexit on the Welsh language should be recognised in connection with other sectors of the economy, such as creative industries and post-16 education, as well as programmes and projects that have potential to combine economic and linguistic benefits. Following on from that, it is essential that the Government, as a matter of urgency, makes plans to mitigate the detrimental effects on the Welsh language and those who use it.

1. The context of this response

The principal aim of the Welsh Language Commissioner is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. In doing so the Commissioner seeks to increase the use of the Welsh language with regard to the provision of services, and via other opportunities. In addition, she has regard to the official status of the Welsh language in Wales and the statutory duties to use Welsh by imposing standards.

Two principles underpin the Commissioner's work:

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

One of the strategic aims of the Commissioner is to influence the consideration given to the Welsh Language in policy development. Comments are submitted in accordance with this remit and in acting as an independent advocate on behalf of Welsh speakers in Wales. This approach is pursued in order to avoid any possible compromise of the Commissioner's regulatory functions, and should the Commissioner wish to review formally the performance of individual bodies in accordance with the provisions of the Measure.

Accordingly, the comments below are submitted in relation to the remit of the inquiry.

2. Economic impact of Brexit on the Welsh language – specific programmes and projects

It is fair to say that it is unclear at present what impact Brexit will have on the Welsh economy. However, it is possible to highlight several aspects of the economy

likely to be affected by Brexit which also have a direct or indirect impact on Welsh speakers.

On the one hand, attention may be drawn to the role of European funding in supporting specific programmes and activities with potential to combine economic and linguistic benefits. These include training programmes contributing to creating skilled bilingual workforce; and projects supporting the use of Welsh in the community and in business by capitalizing at the same time on the language as an economic asset. One example is 'Skills for the Digital Economy', a £4.38 million programme delivered between 2011 and 2015 with the financial assistance of the European Social Fund offering training in the creative field in order to promote a competitive industry in Wales. The project set a target of 20 per cent participation by Welsh speakers.² According to an interim evaluation it delivered well against that target between 2011 and 2013. This is important as research shows that there is a clear demand for Welsh speakers in the creative industries sector, particularly in sub-sectors such as radio, interactive media, advertising, film and animation.

Another example is the Urdd Gobaith Cymru programme 'Routes to the Summit' operated between 2009 and 2013 with financial support of the European Social Fund. The aim of the project was to give opportunities to young people to develop skills connected to the workplace, support their personal and social development, and help them develop through the medium of Welsh in their local communities. According to the programme evaluation, it succeeded to work with 7,293 young people between 11 and 19 years old; give qualifications to 2,056 of them; and increase the awareness of opportunities available through the medium of Welsh. According to an article in the press in June 2016, between 2009 and 2013 the Urdd received £4 mln of European funds towards 'Routes to the Summit' and other activities. Sioned Hughes, Chief Executive of the Urdd, said in the same article that her biggest concern is that young people and children in Wales will lose opportunities when the European funding comes to an end.

There are also examples of organizations in Wales attracting European funds for projects to support the use of Welsh in the community and in business by

capitalizing at the same time on the language as an economic asset. For example, Menter Iaith Conwy succeeded in attracting a grant of £85,000 to create a Welsh-medium nursery in Llandudno Junction. The nursery was opened officially in February 2016. It appears that by June 2016 the nursery was offering the service to 30 children and employing nine staff. More recently Four Cymru attracted financial support from European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development to deliver project 'Welsh Medium Labour Market', in partnership with Mentrau Iaith Cymru. The aim of this project is to 'develop the Welsh language as an economic catalyst to develop and revitalise the Rural Wales'.

3. Economic impact of Brexit on the Welsh language – general effect on the economy

On the other hand, Brexit could have a more general impact on the sectors that provide important areas of employment for Welsh speakers and sustain Welsh-speaking communities. It is generally argued that there is an inter-relationship between the economy and the viability of Welsh-speaking communities. We know from the 2011 Census and further research that agriculture, hospitality and food services are amongst the sectors with high numbers and percentages of Welsh speakers. As the Welsh Government recognises, these are the areas of employment that support communities in rural areas where the percentages and numbers of Welsh speakers are high traditionally but where they have decreased over the last decade.

EU support for these sectors is far-reaching. In addition to funding such as the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the EU Structural Funds, there are programmes providing support specifically to rural communities. These include payments under the Common Agricultural Policy that is subsidies scheme worth £200–£274 million a year to Welsh farmers and landowners. Financial support is also available via the Rural Development Programme, which provides '£957 million to support businesses, farmers, the countryside and communities in rural areas'.

Although it is not yet known what the structure and scale of the support to the sector after leaving the EU, the potential implications are a cause for concern. The

Welsh Government argued that the Welsh farming and food sector could face a 'direct threat' if there is any barrier preventing Welsh businesses from having access to the Single Market. According to evidence submitted recently to the EU Select Committee in the House of Lords, 92 per cent of the sector's exports go to the EU. The Committee heard about the cultural importance of the agricultural sector, particularly in the Welsh heartland, and the possibly 'destructive' impact Brexit could have on economically vulnerable rural communities.

However, other sectors of the economy are likely to be affected, with two-fold implications for Welsh speakers and the local economy. For example, S4C and the BBC commissioned the successful drama 'Hinterland' with European financial support from the EU's MEDIA programme and then Creative Europe. Arad Research found that the filming of the first series of the drama in Ceredigion contributed £1 million to the local economy. Although Fiction Factory, the company who produced 'Hinterland', is based in Cardiff Bay, we know that S4C commissions Welsh-medium content from a large number of other independent companies from across Wales. We also know from S4C's 2014/15 annual report that 42 per cent of the channel's investment was apportioned to North and West Wales, which are economically disadvantaged areas. It can be argued that Brexit will influence the ability of S4C and others in the sector to take advantage of opportunities to attract financial support, and thus also their impact of the Welsh language and the economy.

It is also possible to draw attention to the implications of Brexit for post-16 education sector. In addition to its economic impact, this sector has a central role in the efforts to create skilled bilingual workforce. At the moment, the organizations in the sector benefit from funding sources such as Horizon 2020 to support research and innovation; Erasmus+ to support exchange of students and staff with educational institutions abroad; and the Structural Funds for various training programmes. According to the Institute of Welsh Affairs, the universities in Wales benefit from about £35 million of European funds towards research per annum. According to Colleges Wales, it is expected that Wales will receive investment of over £740 million of EU funds between 2014-2020 through Structural Funds Programme, with over £320m million of this sum dedicated to improving the skill levels of the workforce. Colleges Wales noted as well that over

4.25 million euro was dedicated for further education sector in Wales towards Erasmus programme between 2011 and 2015.

It is true that the use of Welsh language in post-16 education remains low. One example is the limited use of the language in apprenticeships programmes, which are offered in Wales with financial support of the European Social Fund. However, it is essential that financial implications of Brexit do not undermine the efforts to improve the current situation; nor the existing opportunities for Welsh speakers in the sector.

The economic implications of the UK's exit from the European Union for Welsh speakers and Welsh-speaking communities are a cause for concern. It is absolutely essential that Brexit does not undermine the efforts to create more Welsh speakers or to increase the use made of the Welsh language.

1. Response of the Welsh Government to date

In the above context, I welcome the clear commitment of the Welsh Government to safeguard rural areas where the Welsh language is strongest from any detrimental effects of Brexit on the agricultural sector. However, there has been little consideration of the Welsh language to date in discussions on the economic implications of Brexit more generally – for example there was no attention to the Welsh language in the Government's document 'Securing Wales' Future' (2017). As the process of leaving the EU continues I believe it is essential that its impact on the Welsh language receives due consideration in all aspects in all aspects of the work of the Government.

In that regard, I would argue that the extent of the economic impact of Brexit on the Welsh language should be recognised in connection with other sectors of the economy, such as creative industries and post-16 education, as well as specific programmes and projects that have potential to combine economic and linguistic

benefits. Following on from that, it is essential that the Government, as a matter of urgency, makes plans to mitigate the detrimental effects on the Welsh language and those who use it.