
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Fframweithiau cyffredin y DU ar amaethyddiaeth a'r amgylchedd | UK common frameworks on agriculture and environment

UK 14

Ymateb gan : Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Evidence from : Welsh Language Commissioner

Dear Colleague,

UK common frameworks on agriculture and environment

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your inquiry. I would like to emphasise the following points.

- I do not wish to express an opinion for or against the proposals to develop common frameworks in the United Kingdom following its departure from the European Union. However, it is clear that these frameworks have an effect on the sectors that are important for Welsh language speakers. Currently, the Welsh Government can include Welsh language requirements among the conditions of support available through European funds under these frameworks.
- It is essential that this continues to be possible if new common frameworks are developed for the nations of the UK following Brexit. The process of agreeing, planning and implementing the common frameworks should recognise the bilingual nature of Wales. The common frameworks should not in any way impair the ability of Welsh policies in the sectors and fields under consideration to support the Welsh language and the needs of its users.
- Discussions on future of the common frameworks provide a valuable opportunity to revisit current funding systems in terms of the consideration given to the Welsh language. Consideration could be given to the content, implementation methods and methods of evaluating Welsh language requirements and objectives. This could be achieved by

undertaking an appropriate review of current arrangements across different European funds.

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 regards to the provision of services, and via other opportunities. In addition, she will also address the official status of the Welsh language in Wales and, by imposing standards, place statutory duties on organisations to use the Welsh language. One of the Commissioner's strategic aims is to influence the consideration given to the Welsh language in terms of policy development, as is the case here. Further information on the Commissioner's work can be found on the website www.welshlanguagecommissioner.wales.

2. The relevance of the current European frameworks for the Welsh language

I have referred elsewhere to the link between the Welsh language and the economy; and to the importance of specific sectors such as the agricultural sector for the Welsh language and Welsh speakers.¹ I also underlined that Brexit can have double implications for Welsh speakers and for the local economy due to the possible changes in the support to farmers, countryside and rural communities currently available through the programmes under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These concerns are also relevant to other sectors of importance to Welsh speakers which currently receive support under the European frameworks, e.g. the creative sector and the post-16 education and training sector.

The European frameworks also confirm the principles and priorities underlying the support programmes. Under European regulations, 'cross cutting themes' must be integrated into the work of planning and developing activities funded through European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI), including the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).^{2,3} Although some cross cutting themes (such as Equal Opportunities) must be included, it is possible to add to them in accordance with British or Welsh equality policy.

European regulations do not require language to be considered in the context of these themes. However, the Welsh Government decided that the equality objectives for European programmes in Wales should include 'identify[ing] and support[ing] opportunities to promote

¹ See my recent response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's [Inquiry into poverty in Wales: making the economy work for people on low incomes](#); as well as to the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee's inquiry '[Resilience and preparedness: the Welsh Government's administrative and financial response to Brexit](#)'.

² In addition to other funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

³ Also, for rural development programmes under CAP, priorities include social inclusion, tackling poverty and economic development in rural areas. https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020_en

and facilitate the use of the Welsh language'.⁴ According to the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO), funded operations can contribute to these objectives by, e.g.

- ensuring that Welsh language services are actively promoted;
- ensuring that operations contribute to increased provision of Welsh language services and increased use of Welsh by participants; improved Welsh language skills and enhanced economic opportunities in Welsh-speaking areas;
- monitoring progress and positive outcomes regarding the Welsh language.

They can also '[ensure] that all operations and grant-funded services are available through the medium of Welsh and that these services are actively promoted'.⁵

3. Possible implications

I do not wish to express an opinion for or against the proposals to develop common frameworks in the United Kingdom following its departure from the European Union. However, it is clear that these frameworks have an effect on the sectors that are important for Welsh language speakers, in particular the agriculture sector. Currently, the Welsh Government can include Welsh language requirements among the conditions of support available through European funds under these frameworks.

This is appropriate and commendable. Despite the fact that the language is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, the rights of Welsh speakers in Wales are affirmed by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. The Welsh language is also one of the well-being aims in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Albeit differently, these two pieces of legislation provide for a country where the Welsh language is at the heart of public policy.

If the decision to introduce new common frameworks across the United Kingdom is made, the process of agreeing, planning and implementing these frameworks should recognise the bilingual nature of Wales. The common frameworks should not in any way impair the ability of Welsh policies in the sectors and fields under consideration to support the Welsh language and the needs of its users.

At a completely basic level, this means that the common frameworks should not disregard unique needs in relation to the Welsh language, such as the need to translate labels and publications. At a higher level, they should allow for the promotion and facilitation of the

⁴ <https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/170620-cross-cutting-themes-key-document-european-social-fund-en.pdf>, p. 5;

<https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/170620-cross-cutting-themes-key-document-european-regional-development-fund-en.pdf>, p. 5.

⁵ <https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/170620-cross-cutting-themes-key-document-european-social-fund-en.pdf>, p. 10;

<https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/170620-cross-cutting-themes-key-document-european-regional-development-fund-en.pdf>, p. 11.

Welsh language and should deliver outcomes for Welsh speakers and communities where the language is spoken.

4. Extending and strengthening Welsh language requirements

Having said that, the discussions on future of the common frameworks provide a valuable opportunity to revisit current funding systems in terms of the consideration given to the Welsh language. Consideration could be given to the content, implementation methods and methods of evaluating Welsh language requirements and objectives. This could be achieved by undertaking an appropriate review of current arrangements across different European funds.

For example, under current guidelines, it is not 'compulsory' for funded operations to contribute to Welsh language objectives. The current wording does not suggest either that services must be operated and provided bilingually. Consideration could be given to strengthening those requirements.

I also understand that, historically, there have been very few interventions under European support programmes which have actively targeted Welsh speakers, and have been tailored to meet their needs. This was one of the conclusions of the RDP evaluation in 2014.⁶ Others, including the Commissioner, expressed a similar opinion.⁷ However, as far as I know, only a handful of projects which have received European support during recent years have put the Welsh language at the heart of their activities. Among them, only one succeeded in benefiting from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, namely project 'Marchnad Lafur Cymraeg' by Four Cymru in partnership with Mentrau Iaith Cymru.⁸

I also believe that it is worth revisiting the current methods of measuring and evaluating the impact of operations on the Welsh language. WEFO currently collects specific data on the Welsh language, and targets are set in accordance with this data. For example, for ESF projects, requests are made for data on the linguistic ability of participants, their preferred language and the language of provision.⁹ In addition, in June 2015, WEFO decided to introduce additional project-level indicators in order to facilitate the work of recording good practice with regard to the cross cutting themes.¹⁰ (Please note that I am unclear as to the extent to which similar indicators are used for projects under the Rural Development Plan,

⁶ <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/141114-rural-development-programme-environment-impact-assessment-sept-report-en.pdf>

⁷ Welsh Language Commissioner, The Potential of the Welsh Language to Contribute to realising the aims of the European Funding Programmes 2014-2020; Mentrau Iaith Cymru, Cynllun Marchnad Lafur Cyfrwng Cymraeg; [Report of the Task & Finish Group on Welsh Language and Economic Development](#) (January 2014);

⁸ The aim of this project is to 'develop the Welsh language as an economic catalyst to develop and revitalise Rural Wales'. <http://four.cymru/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Marchnad-Lafur-Cymraeg.pdf>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/180502-pmc-papers-may-2018-en.pdf> p. 4

¹⁰ <https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/171129-pmc-papers-dec-17-en.pdf> p. 156

which follow a different evaluation process to ESF and ERDF projects).¹¹ As the current funding system comes to an end, we could use the opportunity to revisit the types of data collected and targets set, and review their weaknesses and strengths.

Conclusion

I trust that you will find the above comments useful. I encourage the Committee to give these comments careful consideration during the inquiry.

Welsh Language Commissioner

¹¹Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy: European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 – Update 2017, <https://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/171129-pmc-papers-dec-17-en.pdf>