

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

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

Ymchwiliad i Effaith Brexit ar Addysg Uwch ac Addysg Bellach: Cylch Gorchwyl | Inquiry on the Impact of Brexit on Higher and Further Education

IB-09

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

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

- The post-16 education sector is essential for the prosperity of the Welsh language.
- Brexit could have various implications for Welsh speakers and Welsh-speaking communities. These implications could also be very relevant to the higher and further education sectors in Wales.
- It is crucial that the effects of Brexit do not undermine the opportunities that currently exist for Welsh speakers in the post-16 education sector. It is important to ensure that any new funding arrangements that might replace current European funding arrangements impact positively on the Welsh language.
- 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 Government's work. Specifically, there is a need to consider its potential impact on the post-16 sector and to consider ways of mitigating against these effects.

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 Welsh language in the post-16 education sector

The post-16 education sector is essential for the prosperity of the Welsh language. For many, it is the period bridging statutory education and the workplace, when a

number of factors can influence individual's linguistic decisions and practices. For this reason, it is central in the efforts to increase the use of Welsh and create a capable bilingual workforce. Currently, however, significant numbers of Welsh speakers lose their Welsh language skills upon the completion of statutory education.

3. Impact of Brexit on the Welsh language

In response to previous calls for evidence to the Assembly's Committees, I have argued that Brexit could have various economic implications for Welsh speakers and Welsh-speaking communities. European funds support programmes and activities with potential to combine economic and linguistic benefits. They also support sectors which provide important areas of employment for Welsh speakers and contribute to the vitality of Welsh-speaking communities.¹

These implications are also very relevant to the further education (FE) and higher education (HE) sectors in Wales. It is crucial that Brexit does not undermine the opportunities that currently exist for Welsh speakers in the post-16 education sector. It is important to ensure that any new funding arrangements that might replace current European funding arrangements impacts positively on the Welsh language.

4. Brexit and the opportunities for Welsh speakers in the FE and HE sectors

The support of the European Union for the FE and HE sectors is far-reaching. The funding sources include 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, universities in Wales benefit from about £35 million of European funds towards research per annum.² According to Colleges Wales, it is expected that Wales will receive investment of over £740 million of EU funds between 2014 and 2020 through Structural Funds Programme, with over £320 million of this sum dedicated to improving the skill levels of the workforce. Colleges Wales noted that over 4.25 million euro was dedicated to the further education sector in Wales towards Erasmus programme between 2011 and 2015.³ Although the remit of the current inquiry does to extend to work based learning,

¹ For further details see my recent responses to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee [‘Inquiry into poverty in Wales: making the economy work for people on low incomes’](#) (October 2010); and the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee inquiry [‘Resilience and preparedness: the Welsh Government’s administrative and financial response to Brexit’](#) (November 2017)

² Institute of Welsh Affairs, ‘What does Brexit mean for the future of Welsh universities?’ (12 May 2017) <http://www.iwa.wales/click/2017/05/brexit-mean-future-welsh-universities/>

³ Colleges Wales, *The EU and Post-16 Education & Training in Wales: an Overview* (July 2016), <http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/Policy>

it is important to emphasise that apprenticeships in Wales are also offered under the sponsorship of the European Union.⁴

Current levels of Welsh medium provision in the post-16 education sector are low.⁵ Without certainty regarding the continuity of current funding arrangements, there is a risk that Brexit could reduce the financial opportunities available to educational institutions in the FE and HE sector. This, in turn, could undermine opportunities for Welsh speakers in these sectors. There are challenges unique to Welsh-medium provision which further exacerbates these concerns.⁶ Due to the lower numbers who are inevitably likely to study Welsh medium higher education courses, Welsh modules tend to cost more per head to offer. This was the interpretation of a [report by the London School of Economics](#) for HEFCW in 2006. While these findings were made in relation to the situation in the HE sector, it can be assumed that they are also relevant to the FE and WBL sectors. If so, the Welsh-medium provision could come under disproportionate strain if the funding opportunities in all these sectors are reduced.

5. Brexit and local economy

I have argued consistently in the past that there is an inter-relationship between the economy and the viability of Welsh-speaking communities.⁷ The HE and FE sectors make an important contribution to the economy. [A study for Universities Wales](#) in January 2018 argued that during 2015-16 the HE sector in Wales generated over £5 billion of output and over 49,000 jobs. [A study for Colleges Wales](#) in 2017 suggested that FE colleges contribute £4 billion to the Welsh economy annually.

If current European funding arrangements are not replaced, there is a risk that Brexit could damage the economic effect of educational institutions on communities. Clearly, these concerns are especially pertinent to the regions of Wales where the percentages of Welsh speakers have traditionally been high, and which also host educational institutions – such as Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. However, one could argue that the economic effect of the educational institutions is beneficial for any Welshspeaking community, whatever its size.

⁴ <https://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/apprenticeships/?lang=en>

⁵ See The Welsh Language Commissioner's Fiver Year Report for a general overview of the situation <http://www.comisiynyddygybraeg.cymru/Cymraeg/Rhestr%20Cyhoeddiadau/Adroddiad%20-mlynedd%20-%205year%20Report.pdf>

⁶ See my response to [Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements](#) (February 2015); and to Welsh Government consultation '[A reformed post - compulsory education and training system](#)' (October 2017)

⁷ For further details see my recent responses to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee '[Inquiry into poverty in Wales: making the economy work for people on low incomes](#)' (October 2010); and the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee inquiry '[Resilience and preparedness: the Welsh Government's administrative and financial response to Brexit](#)' (November 2017)

6. Next steps

I have already welcomed that the Welsh Government recognises the need to safeguard rural areas where the Welsh language is strongest from any detrimental effects of Brexit on the agricultural sector.⁸ As the process of leaving the EU continues, I believe it is essential that its possible impact on the Welsh language receives due consideration in all aspects of the Government's work.

I believe further consideration is required regarding the implications of Brexit for the Welsh language in the context of other sectors (such as the post-16 education sector) in order to better understand the possible effects and ways of mitigating any potential negative effects.

⁸ *Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh speakers*(2017), p. 62.