

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your inquiry. Our response focuses specifically on issues relating to the role of Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) in gathering information on the need for Welsh language skills and communicating this information. Although we recognise some valuable work by the Partnerships in this respect, we would like to emphasise the following points:

- We are concerned that the data on Welsh language skills needs that is currently gathered by the Partnerships is not sufficiently comprehensive, with excessive dependence on past research, which has possibly become outdated;
- We believe that there is not enough consistency in attention dedicated to the Welsh language in publications of the individual Partnerships;
- We note that the evidence gathered does not often lead to clear and specific recommendations with regards to the Welsh language;
- We note that the North Wales Partnership promotes the Welsh language proactively but other Partnerships have not undertaken similar activities.

Section 4 of our response proposes a series of recommendations for the Committee to consider on the basis of these conclusions.

1 Initial comments

The post-16 education sector and the workplace are crucial for the vitality of the Welsh language and central to the realisation of the ambition of Cymraeg 2050 to increase the use of the language. RSPs have an important and increasing influence over the process of planning of the post-16 education provision and development of the Welsh workforce, including over a number of policy developments of direct relevance to the future of the Welsh language in these two areas (see the footnote for details).¹ Considering this, it is vital that RSPs give comprehensive consideration to the Welsh language, in particular by:

- contributing to creating a strong evidence base for Welsh language skills needs;
- sharing this information effectively.

Our response is based on a review of the main publications available on the Partnerships' websites, in addition to discussions with officers from the Partnerships, Welsh Government and others.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this evidence base. We agree with the Graystone conclusion (March 2018) that it is not always easy to find detailed information on the work of RSPs, including the details of the instructions that they receive from the Welsh Government. Although we are aware that the individual Partnerships are working to address this concern, at present there is no consistency in the number and nature of the publications available on their websites. We trust that the Committee will be willing to use this inquiry to improve the evidence base available.

2 Gathering data on Welsh language skills needs

The Welsh Government sets out its requirements for the work of RSPs in annual remit letters. Although these letters are not available on the Partnerships' websites, we understand based on our conversations with several officers that they did not contain detailed formal requirements for RSPs to consider the Welsh language before 2017. However, some attention to the Welsh language is found also in the Partnerships' outputs prior to that date.

2.1 Data sources

The South West and Mid Wales Regional and Learning Skills Partnership (RLSP) and the South East Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSkIP) use an online questionnaire to gather information from employers. We understand that these two Partnerships use the same set of questions, namely:

- Is the Welsh language important for your business?
- Is the use of the Welsh language in your business increasing?
- Is Welsh medium training important for your business?
- How do you think your business may increase the use of Welsh to match the Welsh Government's priorities (if at all)?

The North Wales Partnership does not use a questionnaire to gather information on the needs of employers at present. However, we know that this Partnership also intends to introduce an employer survey from 2019 onwards.

Rather, we understand that the North Wales Partnership relies on other methods of data gathering, including employer engagement at events. RLSP and LSKiP also hold similar meetings and forums. We have heard from officers from the three Partnerships that consideration is given to the Welsh language within these events. However, few records of these events can be found on the Partnerships' websites. Where they are available (e.g. the [LSKiP website](#)) they appear to contain little specific reference to the Welsh language.

In addition, it appears that every Partnership also depends on existing research. This includes the Census (2011); research report Welsh Language Skills Needs in Eight Sectors (2014); and the Employers Skills Survey (2015). They also rely on [Regional Labour Market Intelligence Reports](#) from the Welsh Government. In terms of the Welsh language, these reports replicate the information from the above research, together with data on registration numbers at HEIs in Wales who study through the medium of Welsh.

2.2 The adequacy of the data

It is clear that RSPs gather some very valuable information on the Welsh language. However, we do have several concerns regarding the data gathered:

- We heard on several occasions that the level of response to the Partnerships' surveys is generally low. In terms of the Welsh language specifically, it was also indicated to us that the level of response was low.² The position of the questions on the Welsh language (at the end of the questionnaire) and/or the wording of the questions may be influencing factors in this;
- The questions on the Welsh language are rather basic compared to the detailed research in this field, e.g. Welsh Language Skills Needs in Eight Sectors (2014);
- The sectors under consideration vary between the Partnerships. E.g. the research of RLSP covered the education sector in 2016, but not in subsequent years. In 2018, LSKiP focussed on the Construction, Education, Social Care and Tourism sectors, but not on others;
- Rather than gathering new data, observations frequently show that RSPs' conclusions are based on existing research, which has by now become dated.

- As noted previously, it is difficult to assess what consideration is given to the Welsh language in the engagement activities with employers as there is a lack of accessible records.

It is also important to note at this point that a number of stakeholders and mechanisms in addition to RPSs also gather information on employer Welsh language skills needs, together with levels of these skills within organisations. These include:

- Business Wales (Skills Profile)
- Careers Wales (the Education Business Exchange register)
- the National Centre for Learning Welsh (the Learn Welsh Level Checker)
- Qualifications Wales (sector reviews)
- individual colleges (e.g. employers' forums).

My officers also gather data on the private sector and third sector via our promotional activities. In addition, the organisations that operate under Welsh language standards are required to produce annual reports containing data on the Welsh language skills levels of their workforce.

It is important to consider how these efforts reinforce each other to produce a full and consistent picture of Welsh language skills within the Welsh workforce.

3 Sharing information on Welsh language skills needs

3.1 Attention to the Welsh language in publications and activities of the Partnerships

Undoubtedly, some consideration is given to Welsh language skills within the Skills and Employment Plans and related publications of the Partnerships. E.g.

- the [North Wales Partnership Plan for 2017](#) gives the Welsh language a prominent place, underlining the relevance and value of bilingualism. Specific aims are set in relation to the Welsh language, including the promotion of Welsh medium apprenticeships. Specific consideration is given to the Welsh language in the Health and Care, and Tourism and Hospitality sectors.
- the [RLSP plan for 2018](#)³ includes two paragraphs on the Welsh language, together with occasional references in the context of specific sectors where some demand is observed (e.g. Tourism and Hospitality; Creative Industries;

Health and Care). In comparison, the [RLSP plan for 2017](#) considered the Welsh language in each sector profile.

- The LSKIP [Cardiff Capital Region Employment and Skills Plan 2017](#) refers to Welsh language skills in the context of the IT sector and the foundational economy. There is also attention to the availability of qualifications in specific sectors, including the Welsh language; and the demand for Welsh speaking teachers. The Welsh language is considered in the [SME Skills Survey in 2017](#)⁴ as well as [Business Skills Survey](#) (2018) which looks at the Construction, Education, Social Care and Tourism sectors. The Survey 2018 data with respect to the Welsh language skills is considered in the full annual report by the Partnership to the Welsh Government. The report observes that the findings overall are 'mixed'. However, it is important to note that this report is not available on the website of the Partnership at the time of writing. Rather, a more concise version (available [here](#)) contains only limited references to the Welsh language.

In addition, there are examples of publications and activities that focus specifically on the Welsh language. E.g.

- The RLSP [published a separate report on the Welsh language](#) (undated, but circa 2014). This report includes data on Welsh medium education and attitudes towards Welsh language skills in the region; statutory requirements and language schemes operated by the main organisations; and information regarding the wider policy context.
- More recently, the North Wales Partnership published [the Welsh Language in North Wales](#) in collaboration with employers, education providers and other stakeholders. My office also contributed to the work. This report includes statistical data, e.g. on the use of Welsh in the statutory and post-16 education sector, and the Welsh language skills needs in the region. There is also a series of case studies from organisations promoting the language across their work; and contributions by the main stakeholders. The report also includes conclusions and recommendations.

We also understand that the North Wales Partnership also actively promotes the Welsh language. The report on [the Welsh Language in North Wales](#) noted that there was a potential to establish a regional forum in order to coordinate the promotion of Welsh across the region. Although it was ultimately decided not to establish a new structure, we know that a detailed action plan was agreed and is currently being implemented, in close collaboration with the School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales (GwE).

3.2 The adequacy of attention to the Welsh language

As discussed above, the Partnerships' publications include some attention to the Welsh language. However:

- The extent of attention varies from Partnership to Partnership. The North Wales Partnership places the Welsh language at the heart of its publications.

In comparison, the publications of other Partnerships include references to the Welsh language in some sections, but not in others. These references are at times very limited.

- The Welsh language is not considered in every relevant publication. E.g. the language is not considered the [RLSP report on apprenticeships \(2015\)](#).⁵
- The extent of the data gathered and reported on by the Partnerships is not consistent. Welsh language skills needs are not always highlighted in all sectors. Frequently, no clear reference is made to the availability of Welsh medium education or the numbers studying through the medium of Welsh. Rarely is the Welsh language considered in the context of key training programmes such as apprenticeships.
- It is unsurprising therefore that only occasionally do the Partnership formulate clear and specific recommendations regarding Welsh language skills needs in the Skills and Employment Plans (although we note three relevant recommendations in the North Wales Partnership Plan 2017; and one in the LSKIP plan 2017).
- The publications specifically considering the Welsh language represent a very useful method of disseminating relevant information. We particularly welcome the latest publication by the North Wales Partnership. The main strength of the report is that it contains recommendations and action steps and does not solely report on the evidence. However, the report clearly highlights weaknesses of the available data on Welsh language skills needs.
- The North Wales Partnership goes one step further than the others in that it works proactively to promote the Welsh language in the region. No clear examples of similar work by the other Partnerships were observed.

4 Conclusions and recommendations for the Committee to consider

It is vital that the planning of Welsh medium post-16 education and training provision is based on up-to-date data. However, we are concerned that the data gathered at present by the Partnerships is not sufficiently comprehensive and that too much emphasis is placed on past research which has by now possibly become outdated.

We also believe that there is a lack of consistency in the consideration given to the Welsh language by the individual Partnerships. We note that the evidence gathered does not often lead to clear and specific recommendations with respect to the Welsh language. We also note that the North Wales Partnership actively promotes the Welsh language, but the other Partnerships have not undertaken similar activities.

We therefore ask that the Committee to consider recommending that the Welsh Government does the following:

- review the resources available to RSPs in order to gather data on the Welsh language;
- commission research to build upon the findings of the report on Welsh Language Skills Needs in Eight Sectors (2014);
- ensure that the Partnerships as well as any research commissioned give due attention to a wide range of sectors. These should include the sectors that are of particular importance to Welsh speakers, such as the education sector. However, one could argue that Welsh language skills are relevant to every sector and that each and every one contributes to the realisation of the Cymraeg 2050 Strategy;
- review the instructions given to RSPs to ensure that they enable the Partnerships to collect comprehensive data on the Welsh language and promote the language proactively, in line with the Welsh Government's vision for the Welsh language as expressed in Cymraeg 2050 Strategy.

We also ask that the Committee considers recommending that RSPs carry out the following, within their remit as set by the Welsh Government:

- review and ensure the consistency of the data on the Welsh language published in the Skills and Employment Plans and other key publications, so that it is possible to construct a consistent local and national picture of Welsh language skills needs within the Welsh workforce;

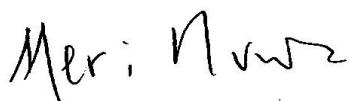
- endeavour to consistently formulate clearer recommendations in relation to the Welsh language;
- consider to what extent RLSP and LSKiP could adopt a more proactive approach towards the promotion of the Welsh language.

5 Closing remarks

I would also like to emphasise that we have already been in contact with officers from the Partnerships and other stakeholders to discuss such matters as the wording of the surveys, and the potential to ensure consistency and maximise the contribution of other available data sources on Welsh language skills. We are also aware of the commitment by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to work closely with the Partnerships in using labour market data for planning and promotion of the Welsh medium provision in further education and work-based learning sector. Improving the capacity of RSPs will be key to the success of this initiative as well as to the realisation of the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 Strategy.

I hope that you find these comments useful.

Yours sincerely,



Meri Huws

Welsh Language Commissioner

¹ The RSPs' Skills Plans directly inform the instructions by the Welsh Government to further education providers (in the form of annual remit letters) and work-based learning providers (through contracts). In addition, we understand that RSPs also communicate directly with the providers in order to address gaps in current provision.

The Welsh Government acknowledges the role of the Partnerships within a number of key policies relating to the future of education and employment, including: Action Plan on the Economy; ['Aligning the Apprenticeship Model to the Needs of the Welsh Economy'](#); proposals for establishing [a Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales](#); and proposals for [adapting the arrangements for the development and approval of apprenticeships frameworks in Wales](#).

Two Partnerships (RLSP and LSKiP) have a role in the City Deals. LSKiP works within the structures of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal. We understand that the RLSP leads on the Skills and Talents Initiative as part of the Swansea Bay City Deal.

² LSKiP noted this problem in its full annual report to the Welsh Government 2018 (not on the website of the Partnership at the time of writing)

³ This report is available on the website in English only.

⁴ Prepared for LSkip by Cardiff and Vale College. The review considered the Advanced Materials and Manufacturing; Construction; Financial and Professional Services; ITC/Digital (as a crosscutting theme); and the Foundational Economy sector. The research found that there was very little demand by the majority of large companies, and only a low level of demand by smaller companies.

⁵ The full report is available on the website in English only.