

WESP 05

Cynlluniau Strategol Cymraeg mewn Addysg - y fframwaith deddfwriaethol sy'n cefnogi Darpariaeth Addysg Gymraeg | Welsh in Education Strategic Plans - the legislative framework that supports Welsh-Medium Education Provision
Ymateb gan Colegau Cymru | Response from Colleges Wales

Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) – the legislative framework that supports Welsh Medium Education Provision

24 June 2022

About ColegauCymru

ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the Further Education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents FE colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to submit a consultation response to the Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, and the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) – the legislative framework that supports Welsh Medium Education Provision.

1 Background

- 1.1 Further Education colleges in Wales are supportive of the Welsh Government's vision of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. As organisations that are subject to the Welsh Language Standards, they must provide a Welsh language service for both students and staff. ColegauCymru played a key role in shaping the Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh Medium Action Plan, and work with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Welsh Government, the FEIs and apprenticeship providers delivering this plan.
- 1.2 The WESPs should be a vital component in the planning of Welsh medium and bilingual education in FEIs, which directly links to the vision of Cymraeg 2050. However, feedback suggests that the standard of the WESPs varies across Local Authorities (LAs). Relationships and ongoing engagement with some colleges could be substantially strengthened.
- 1.3 While FE colleges are not directly subject to the requirements of the WESPs, at least one college now has their own 'Welsh education action plan' that is to be included as part of the LA WESP as a result of their involvement in the creation of the WESP. It would appear to be a missed opportunity not to reflect the Welsh medium and bilingual development plans that FE Colleges have in the relevant WESPs.
- 1.4 LAs are required to indicate in their WESPs how they propose to increase the percentage of learners aged 16 -19 who study subjects through the medium of Welsh in schools, however this does not directly include or affect learners in FE colleges. We would suggest that the WESPs should consider all learners aged 16-19 whether they are at school or attending an FE college.
- 1.5 The Covid-19 pandemic raised issues around the use of the Welsh language in colleges, and as a result of disrupted teaching, many pupils entering college demonstrated less confidence in their linguistic skills.

1.6 College leaders are aware that even before Covid-19 impacted their operations, the number of Welsh Language and bilingual learning opportunities across academic, vocational, and technical programmes was at a low base. The reasons for this are multifaceted and represent a complex challenge to overcome. For this to improve, a significant investment of time, effort and of course funding is required across a number of fronts. It will also require a change in culture and values from across a wide range of stakeholders as well as from learners and their parents, particularly those who are Welsh speaking. Delivering on the FE and Apprenticeships Welsh Medium Action Plan and securing suitable resources to succeed in this work is crucial.

1.7 There is a growing network of bilingual staff who support the development of Welsh medium and bilingual provision across the Colleges. These include staff who were initially appointed as part of the Welsh Government bilingual champions scheme, development officers funded by Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and teaching and lecturing posts supported by the FEIs and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. The roles are varied but focus mainly on ensuring that learners beginning at college maintain their Welsh language skills, while also encouraging learners to build on skills needed for their chosen course. These staff promote not only the Welsh language, but also the Welsh community including the Urdd and volunteering opportunities.

2 Has the current statutory framework for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) improved since the recommendations published in December 2015 in the report of the 'Inquiry into Welsh in Education Strategic Plans' by the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the Fourth Senedd?

2.1 Many colleges commented that FE involvement in the planning of the WESPs had improved in recent years. However, this was not the consensus across all institutions. This needs to be more structured and consistent across the country.

2.2 Similarly, some colleges commented that FE representation on relevant working groups had also improved, however, again, this was not the case for all colleges. Although Welsh Education forums are not a statutory requirement, in LAs where they have been created it would be beneficial for them to have input from the relevant FEI in order to see how Welsh-medium education has progressed on to post-16.

2.3 From feedback gathered, it is clear that some colleges have good working relationships with their LAs, and some are in need of strengthening. Developing a consistent pattern of engagement here is key.

2.4 The circumstances of each college must also be taken into account when considering the WESPs, and how each college plans their Welsh provision. For example, a college in south east Wales with a low number of fluent Welsh speakers may require a different working relationship with their LA, particularly on the development of WESPs, than a college in north Wales with a higher number of Welsh speakers. While the former may focus on the

development of lower-level Welsh language skills at a 'courtesy' level, the latter may offer a range of courses entirely through the medium of Welsh.

3 To what extent do Welsh in Education Strategic Plans contribute to the outcomes and targets set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy – Cymraeg 2050?

3.1 The WESPs are instrumental in delivering the vision of Cymraeg 2050, and as previously stated, FEIs in Wales are fully supportive of the strategy.

3.2 The remit for WESPs is statutory education and sets targets for the increase in numbers of year 1 learners being taught through the medium of Welsh. While the key outcomes stated in the Guidance on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans do not go further than statutory education, it is important to remember that colleges work hard to promote and encourage their learners to continue their education through the medium of Welsh, and make an important contribution to the 14-16 curriculum through the local 14-19 Networks.¹ Therefore, thought should be given to the role FEIs play not only in the realisation of Cymraeg 2050, but also the continuation of achieving the outcomes of the WESP. This should be explicitly referenced in all WESPs.

3.3 One college noted that the WESP in their LA is more focused than it used to be, including SMART targets and actions which includes the post-16 sector in that area.

3.4 Another college commented that the action plan they created to be included within the LA WESP is wholly based on outcomes and targets as set out in the Welsh Language Strategy and references each applicable outcome specifically.

3.5 While these colleges have a strong working relationship with their LA, it must be noted that this was not the consensus across the sector.

4 How are local authorities responding to changes to guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision, and are they meeting the Welsh Government's ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools?

4.1 While there have been targets set to increase Welsh-medium provision in English-medium and dual-stream schools, colleges noted that this was still a challenge to overcome. This is very important given the focus in the FE and Apprenticeships action plan on delivering some element of bilingual provision to all learners.

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-02/guidance-welsh-in-education-strategic-plan.pdf>, p.14

5 What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium provision, ahead of a proposed Welsh Language Education Bill?

5.1 Colleges noted that it is important to not only increase learners' knowledge of the availability of Welsh-medium provision, but also parents and carers. This was felt with both academic and work-based learning activities.

5.2 In the FE sector, there must be a balance between promoting the Welsh medium strategy and joining up WESPs in an efficient and deliverable way. The ongoing impact of Covid-19 must be taken into account.

5.3 An ongoing challenge faced by colleges is ensuring there are enough lecturers who can teach through Welsh. This is especially difficult in some of the vocational sectors, where the lecturer must be a dual professional, with both first-hand industry experience, and Welsh language teaching skills. Work is ongoing within Welsh Government on promoting teaching careers more generally, but the key contribution of the FE sector must not be overlooked in this work.

5.4 In order to support the need for more delivery through the Welsh language, colleges in Wales have the opportunity to take part in the Cymraeg Gwaith scheme. Supported by the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Colegau Cymru co-ordinates the Cymraeg Gwaith project for the Further Education sector in collaboration with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

5.5 Since the pilot year in 2017, the scheme has consistently reached its goal of providing staff in further education colleges with the opportunity to improve their Welsh and bilingual skills, with the aim of increasing the number of staff who can teach through Welsh. The scheme is entering its sixth cycle this year and will continue to have a positive impact on upskilling staff in FE to develop their Welsh language skills to be able to deliver at least part of their teaching in Welsh. The Committee might like to explore how to ensure that funding for the post-16 sector to upskill staff can be put on a more secure, long-term basis that operates on academic years. Too often, funding is provided on an annual basis on a financial year cycle which does not provide the right level of security to make the maximum impact.

5.6 The vision of the proposed Welsh Education Bill, which will ensure all learners in any part of Wales can be educated through the medium of Welsh, will need to take post-16 provision, especially FE and vocational education, into consideration from the outset. A learner who has received their statutory education through the medium of Welsh should be offered a seamless transition when it comes to continuing onto further education, while learners who have acquired a level of skill in Welsh should have opportunities to maintain and develop their skills during their vocational education.

5.7 In a letter to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee in November 2021 regarding his Ministerial portfolio, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language stated that he was "keen to ensure that learners are given the

opportunity to continue on their journey to acquire Welsh language skills during the post-16 phase”² Colegau Cymru is keen to see the details of how post-16 education will be included in the draft Bill and looks forward to playing a key role in discussions and development.

5.8 The continuation of funding of Welsh-medium provision is currently supported in priority vocational areas on a taper model by grants from Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. Securing long term funding to support teaching provision is crucial to the success of the scheme in contributing towards the Cymraeg 2050 goals.

5.9 As stated above, colleges have faced difficulties acquiring and retaining lecturers to teach vocational subjects. Reasons for this vary, however, the most common is that the pay and conditions in industry are often better than in the education sector. This makes it very difficult to hire lecturers from industry with the first-hand experience needed for teaching, with the Welsh language requirement proving an additional challenge. One of the aims of the proposed Welsh Language Bill is to “set new ambitions and incentives to expand the proportion of the education workforce who can teach and/or work through the medium of the Welsh language”³. Colegau Cymru would be keen to explore how this aim can be achieved most effectively in the FE sector.

6 Summary

6.1 There is a need for consistent best practice in terms of relationships between the FE sector and LAs, especially with reference to the creation and development of the WESPs. At present, relationships are variable with some colleges reporting positive engagement while others have a different experience. Some colleges report differences within the different LAs that they operate in regard to the WESP. The Committee might like to explore ways to support greater consistency and engagement on this issue.

6.2 The FE sector in Wales is fully supportive of Cymraeg 2050 and works to promote and encourage not only the use of the Welsh language, but also the Welsh community. Effective WESPs are a positive way of assisting towards the target of a million Welsh speakers.

6.3 Awareness must be raised at the 14-16 level of the availability of progression at post-16 through the medium of Welsh and bilingually, particularly in vocational areas. There must be an emphasis on schools and FE colleges to work together, to ensure that they promote access, highlight opportunities and encourage learners with Welsh language skills to continue their education through the medium of Welsh.

6.4 This also means supporting the post-16 sector with long-term, secure funding to upskill lecturers to the right level to deliver through Welsh. Again, the issue of longer-term funding

² <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s119307/Paper%205.4.pdf>

³ <https://gov.wales/co-operation-agreement-full-policy-programme-html>

to support this development in the post-16 sector is something the Committee might like to explore as part of the inquiry.

6.5 Colegau Cymru is keen to see how the proposed Welsh Education Bill will include the FE sector and eager to be a part of the consultation process in the future.

Amy Evans
Policy Officer, Colegau Cymru



Elusen Cofrestredig | Registered Charity: 1060182
Cwmni Cofrestredig | Registered Company: 2832103