

Further evidence on the implications of the Census data

1. What challenges does the decrease in the number of Welsh speakers pose for local authority delivery of WESPs?

Delivery of WESPs will become even more critical and will require greater commitment and increased efforts by all agencies. As highlighted in our original evidence, there is a need for consistent best practice in terms of relationships between the FE sector and Local Authorities (LA), 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. The LA run Welsh Education forums would benefit from receiving input from their local FEI in order to see how Welsh-medium education has progressed on to post-16. Further discussions with colleges have highlighted that some are members of their LA Welsh Education Forum, and find it beneficial to be part of a group with where many Welsh organisations are represented. The Committee might like to explore these Welsh Education forums further, and how they may be better utilized.

For those LAs where there has been a significant decrease in the number of Welsh speakers, the WESP may need to be revisited to identify areas that need to be strengthened or require greater input e.g. increased language immersion provision and support; increased input/intervention at each key stage transition point; increased Welsh-language learning opportunities within the curriculum and within extra-curricular activities in order to create more confident Welsh speakers. Regular monitoring and scrutiny of the WESPs is key to ensuring they are fit for purpose and are adaptable to any situation which may arise (for example, the effects of Covid-19).

2. What challenges lie ahead in the planning and development of Welsh-medium education provision in light of the Census data, and more specifically, the challenge of ensuring pupils in the English-medium sector are fluent as they leave school?

One of the main challenges will be ensuring sufficient staffing levels and staff with adequate Welsh language skills to deliver the WESP. WESPs will need to be supported by a comprehensive Welsh language skills development training programme to support staff at all levels.

Ensuring pupils in English-medium sector becoming fluent in Welsh will involve more than learning Welsh in Welsh lessons. Increased, regular opportunities to encourage the use of Welsh outside of the classroom will need to be built into plans to instill confidence to use Welsh outside of the classroom. This activity will contribute towards increasing fluency levels.

The new curriculum must also be flexible and recognise language development as an integral part of the syllabus.

From an FE sector point of view, colleges who have Welsh language specialty through their 14-16 networks are in a position to support schools who may not have the specific expertise to teach through the medium of Welsh. This will encourage collaboration between the school and FE sector, and also support the creation of a Welsh speaking future workforce.

We have recently seen a group of primary aged Ukrainian children learn to speak Welsh fluently in just 11 weeks. This highlights that immersing children within a language is hugely beneficial. We understand that English-medium schools do not currently provide a comprehensive education through Welsh, however the new curriculum should provide more opportunities for Welsh to become embedded within the school day.

3. What funding considerations might be needed going forward to support the full development of the WESPs given the decrease in the number of Welsh speakers?

Increased resource for more intensive Welsh language training for staff to ensure adequate skills to deliver the WESP. One college commented that the National Sabbatical Scheme has proven to be an excellent opportunity to generate more Welsh speaking teachers, and that this scheme would contribute towards building staff capacity.

One college commented that Sgiliaith, who offer professional development opportunities around bilingual teaching, would benefit from increased funding to develop further online learning and resources. Covid-19 has shown the value of digital learning and education, therefore it's important that digital resources are utilized, promoted, and funded for continual development.

Another college mentioned that funding is needed to provide more Welsh-medium enrichment opportunities for pupils as a means of improving engagement with the language. Activity could also include parents; employers and other stakeholders.

Finally, colleagues noted that further funding could go to support schools and colleges to enhance the implementation of their Siarter Iaith schemes.

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