

P-04-488 The right to decide: an end to the compulsory study of Welsh to GCSE – Correspondence from the petitioner to the Chair, 26.10.2013

Dear Ms Driscoll,

1. Many thanks for the email, the attachments and a further opportunity to support my case. I have made a careful study of 'One Language for All' (henceforth 'the Report') in which my petition is noted at para 4.6. By way of information, I am not a fluent Welsh speaker, though I can get by in the colloquial Welsh of the South Wales valleys. By profession I am a practising barrister and a former civil servant, with no political affiliations.

2. I do not think I could be criticised for dishonesty if I paraphrased the Report thus:

The authors believe the most significant defining characteristic of the Welsh is the language. They note the language is in decline and relate how, in 1990, the study of the Welsh language in English medium schools was made compulsory to a certain level. These efforts have proved unsuccessful in promoting the acceptance and use of the language among most students, who are not enthusiastic for their studies and who question the relevance to their futures.. The authors' solution, in short, is more of the same, but much stronger, in particular, making Welsh a core subject in assessing the quality of a school. At the same time the authors envisage making the study of Welsh more attractive by increasing the need to use the language in Welsh life.

3. My aim by this note is to support my petition, but this may best be achieved by an honest critique of the reasoning in the Report. I have no small amount of experience of writing reports for government, so I know something of what I write. As with the policy I object to, it seems to me that the Report disregards choice and turns its back on obvious evidence that should have guided it. Speaking Welsh, it seems to the authors, is all, and the Welsh monoglot majority are ignored, made invisible even. The driver for my petition is my strong preference for choice, so akin to democracy itself, and a hatred of compulsion. I love my country, but it seems to me that, rather than seducing Welsh youth to a noble cause, they are being kidnapped!

4. It is apparent from the methodology described in para 2.5 of the Report that all the authors are Welsh speakers. It is also apparent that they devised a consultation that was not a tool to unearth important truths, but which truths the introduction to the Report alludes to, see the second para of the Foreword. The students, it seems, are broadly unenthusiastic to the present regime. Para 4.6 is important; it marshals the material, but does not describe in any detail what the 'majority of the evidence' is. Myself, I also think the phrase is grammatically inapt. There is little description of the gathering and analysis of materials that would be consistent with any government report that I have contributed to or reviewed. An obvious source of evidence would have been a significant sample of students, say one thousand, in proportion to those who took the short and core courses, together with a similar sample in the last year of study. The questions to be asked: Did (or do) you enjoy the study? Did (do) you feel it relevant to your life plans? Did (do) you propose to continue to study Welsh in the future? If this had revealed strong antipathy then another solution to the problem would need to be surfaced and the study would have done its job. The failure of the authors to employ a sound methodology leaves any policy decision or legislative initiative made on its findings susceptible to judicial review. This is not wild speculation: I refer the Welsh Government to the recent challenges to the Digital Economy Act.

.5. For the sake of completeness , might I also add that the recommendations made in the Report will be resource hungry and very difficult to achieve. Where will the large numbers of inspiring Welsh teachers to be found? The Report also risks a backlash if the Senedd without more accepts the passionate views expressed by Professor Davies, which I presume are shared by the other authors. Is the future of Welsh culture wholly dependent on transmitting the language to our young people? What happened to Dylan Thomas, Augustus John, Aneurin Bevan, Richard Burton, Prof Eddie Bowen or Stanley Baker? Do we also ignore Neil Kinnock, Shirley Bassey, Joe Calzaghe, Catherine Zeta Jones, Prof Sreve Jones, Anthony Hopkins, John Humphreys, Michael Sheen and so many other Welsh greats who did not need the language to make our people proud to be Welsh?

6. For me, the Welsh qualities that shine so strongly ,above all, are a deep sense of fair play, a love of truth and an abundance of intelligent wit. With these same qualities the Welsh became masters of the English language and are undiminished by its use. That said, I wish the language cause well, but you cannot beat hwyl into people!

Hope this reaches you before Monday the 31st of October 2013.

David Fitzpatrick