

Huw Lewis AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau  
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-649  
Ein cyf/Our ref HL/01393/15

William Powell AM  
Chair - Petitions Committee

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31 July 2015

Dear William

Thank you for your letter dated 16 July seeking my views on petition P-04-649 *Welsh Medium Education – Garland or Albatross?*

The petitioner is asking *for the Welsh Medium Education experiment to be abandoned – unless it can be clearly shown that its continuance is doing no harm.*

The Welsh Government is committed to seeing the Welsh language thrive. This is clearly set out in the Welsh language strategy *A living language: a language for living*. In addition, the Welsh Government published a Welsh-medium Education Strategy in 2010, outlining our vision to *have an education and training system ... that enables an increase in the number of people of all ages and backgrounds who are fluent in Welsh and able to use the language with their families, in their communities and in the workplace.*

The provision of Welsh-medium education is not an 'experiment'. Welsh-medium education has always existed in Wales and has become more evident since 1947, when the first state Welsh-medium primary school was opened, and the sector has grown rapidly since then, led primarily by parental demand. In 2014 around 30% of primary, middle and secondary schools in Wales were Welsh-medium or bilingual schools, with 22.2% of 7-year-old pupils assessed in Welsh first language.

Mr Hudson's rationale appears to be conflating two different considerations: the perceived negative effects brought about by Welsh-medium education, and the disadvantages faced by the school population as a whole (as evidenced, he claims, by low PISA results).

Some additional analysis of PISA 2015 results has been undertaken, including analysis of performance by medium of instruction and subject. The analysis showed that in reading and science, the performance of learners attending Welsh-medium and English-medium schools is comparable. However, in mathematics, learners attending the Welsh-medium schools outperform those in English-medium schools by 10 score points. There appears to be no

clear link, therefore, between the medium of instruction and performance in the PISA tests. There is also no evidence to support his assertion that 50% of the population with 'below average' language skills do not have the capacity to become bilingual. The processes involved in learners' acquisition of skills in more than one language are complex. At various stages of these processes learners will be at different levels of development in their ability to use both (or more) languages. In that sense bilingual learners will not necessarily display the same level or type of ability in their two languages at any one stage of their development.

Mr Hudson also suggests that there is no evidence that employers value and want workers who are bilingual in English and Welsh. A report published in April 2014 *Welsh language skills needs in eight sectors* found that over a quarter of establishments (28 per cent) believed that it would benefit them to have more staff able to communicate in Welsh, or more staff with a higher level of Welsh language skills.

He also suggests that *£12m is frittered away, each year, on the Welsh for Adults programme: not in the classroom, on "teaching", but on administration.* Of the £12m invested in the Welsh for Adults programme each year, approximately £10m of this is spent on the delivery of the courses themselves. The remaining £2m is spent on developing specific aspects of the programme e.g. tutor training, e-learning and improved marketing.

In summary, there is no evidence to suggest that Welsh-medium education has a detrimental effect on learners' attainment, and the Welsh Government has no intention of 'abandoning' the 'Welsh-medium experiment'. It is the provision of Welsh-medium education that has generated the greatest gains in the number of young people fluent and confident in their Welsh language skills, and there is no question that the education system has a vitally important role in securing the future of the language. As noted above, Welsh-medium education pre-dates the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales, and is a key part of our education and training system in Wales, driven in the main by parental demand and specific local policies.

Yours sincerely



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