

Paper for Recovery Board, 7 October 2020

The future of the Welsh Language

Purpose of this paper

1. To inform the Recovery Board of the risks and opportunities to the future of the Welsh language and delivery of our *Cymraeg 2050* strategy that arise in light of the coronavirus pandemic and the possibility of a no deal Brexit.

Scope

2. The focus of this paper is on sociolinguistic aspects of Welsh language policy. It does not extend to matters relating to compliance with Welsh language standards and the advancement of institutional bilingualism i.e. the delivery of services in Welsh/translation.

Context

3. Welsh language policy is a long-term pursuit – and is at the heart of the Future Generations agenda. Our [Cymraeg 2050 strategy](#) articulates the steps we must take to achieve our two headline targets by 2050 to:
 - reach 1 million Welsh speakers¹; and
 - double the daily use of Welsh².
4. The Welsh Government's leadership in implementing the strategy requires a combination of:
 - language planning and behavioural change interventions led by the Welsh Language Division;
 - actions across key policy areas (education, digital, international and the economy – including housing, planning, agriculture) to create favourable socio-economic conditions to facilitate the strategy's aims.

Key issues arising from the pandemic and Brexit

5. Since the start of the pandemic the **short-term challenges** we faced were to support the short-term resilience of partner Welsh language organisations³, ensure that the interests of children in Welsh-medium education and their parents were addressed during lockdown and in the school reopening process, and ensure that the renewed online approach to adult Welsh language learning was supported. The Welsh Language Division will continue to monitor, improve and strengthen these approaches.

¹ In the 2011 Census 562,000 people said they could speak Welsh.

² The target is: the percentage of the population that speak Welsh daily, and can speak more than just a few words of Welsh, to increase from 10 per cent (in 2013–15) to 20 per cent by 2050

³ Examples include the Urdd (national Welsh language youth organisation), National Eisteddfod and Mentrau Iaith (local language initiatives).

6. However, we must also address the potential **medium to long-term impacts** of both the pandemic and a possible no-deal Brexit on the Welsh language within the context of wider societal and economic changes and challenges. There will be impacts across Wales, but there is a risk that these will be more acute in the west and north-west in those areas that have high percentages of Welsh-speakers. This presents a significant risk to the future of these communities and, in turn, the future of the Welsh language.

Our Cymraeg 2050 strategy

7. In order to reach our *Cymraeg 2050* targets, we must both:
 - A. **maintain current Welsh-speaking communities and networks** (geographical or otherwise); and
 - B. **increase the number of people who learn and use the Welsh language** in future.
8. In terms of A, this means maintaining Welsh as the primary language spoken in the community in large parts of the west and north-west. In terms of B, this means supporting people all over Wales to become new Welsh speakers by expanding access to Welsh medium education. We also need to improve linguistic outcomes in English medium education.
9. If we fail to maintain our Welsh-speaking communities there is a risk that Welsh becomes a subaltern ‘hobby’ language where people obtain the skill of speaking Welsh but do not use it in a meaningful way. We must be vigilant and learn the lessons from Ireland where, at the last census in 2016, 1.77 million people said they could speak Irish, but only 78,000 said they spoke the language daily outside the classroom environment.
10. Language is a social phenomenon that by its nature requires communities of speakers to exist to facilitate its use. The maps at Annex 1 show the distribution of Welsh speakers across Wales at the last Census in 2011. Without maintaining linguistically vibrant communities in the west and north-west there will be fewer opportunities for people to use the language in everyday social situations. That in turn will lead to weakening the foundations for the task of creating new speakers across Wales. A decline in the west and north-west therefore risks us falling short of both the million speakers target and the ambition to embed the use of the language in our daily lives represented by the target of doubling the daily use of Welsh.

Maintaining current Welsh-speaking communities

11. Given the above, language maintenance in the west and north-west requires careful consideration. Our focus needs to be on maintaining the social fabric of Welsh-speaking communities and avoiding creating an imbalance within those communities. The following provides some examples of issues that are of strategic importance to the language.

12. The risk of Brexit to **the agriculture industry** is a significant concern given that the agriculture sector is by some margin the sector of the economy that has proportionally the highest percentage of Welsh speakers within the workforce with 43% of workers in the sector able to speak Welsh. There is wide variation between local authorities across Wales, with high percentages in Gwynedd (86%), Conwy (80%), Ynys Môn (77%), Ceredigion (72%) and Carmarthenshire (62%). In these counties, agriculture is an important employment. A contraction in the agricultural industry will have a disproportionate effect on Welsh-speaking communities.
13. [Geographical vulnerability mapping work](#) undertaken by ERA into the potential effect of various Brexit scenarios on agricultural land use illustrates the potential impacts new trading arrangements may have on agriculture in Wales. It is estimated there would be a reduction of 3% in large farm work with access to the EU market helping to ensure a relatively smooth transition. A no-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) scenario could see a reduction of an estimated 10% in large farm work, and a multi-FTA scenario with various countries could see a decline of up to 27%. ERA has recently commenced further work to update these models in more detail to take account of various possible multi-FTA scenarios and to be extended to take account of the effects of the pandemic.
14. Overall, there is a risk that the cumulative effects of multi-FTA may see a narrowing of opportunities in rural Welsh-speaking communities, with a knock-on effect of reducing the prevalence of Welsh language use.
15. When considering the cumulative potential effects of Brexit and of the pandemic on **the wider economy**, it should be noted that while Brexit-impacted industries and pandemic-impacted industries are not necessarily the same and there will be overlaps in terms of places and sectors of society affected. With regard to rural Welsh-speaking communities, there is therefore a long-term set of risks relating to the agriculture industry together with a short-term set of risks related to the pandemic to the tourism industry and rural SMEs.
16. The pandemic has also brought to the fore the sensitive but significant issues of **the impact of second-home ownership** on the sustainability of rural, and in particular coastal communities in the west and north-west. Concerns about the inequity of the housing market in these communities with local people unable to access the market in the areas where they were raised are increasingly being voiced and acknowledged by Ministers. Welsh Revenue Authority statistics showed reported that in the period between March 2019 and April 2020 38% of properties sold in Gwynedd were purchased as second homes.
17. While these concerns about second homes are common elsewhere in the UK and beyond, the fact that many of the communities affected in Wales are our

Welsh-speaking communities provides a different lens through which we must view the issue. This is a complex issue, with a range of possible policy responses and Ministers have made commitments to consider these issues with MSs from across the Senedd.

18. A potential benefit of **the 30% home, remote and co-working target** adopted recently may be to attract Welsh-speaking professionals to return to the area of their upbringing, having previously left to pursue careers elsewhere. A weekly rather than daily commute from the north-west to Chester, Liverpool or Manchester – or from the south-west to Cardiff or Bristol for example – may be enough of an incentive for some people to return. Similarly, the ability to work remotely may make it easier for people to remain living in the area of their upbringing without having to move elsewhere in the first instance. The Economy Sub-group of the Welsh Language Partnership Council has been considering the merits of an intervention similar to the ethos of the Llwybro-Routes project that existed in the 1990s and 2000s to keep regular contact with people that have left rural areas for educational or employment reasons. Circulars were sent out as part of that project to advertise employment opportunities available within rural and Welsh-speaking areas.
19. With an increase in remote working, ensuring there are opportunities within the proposed co-working spaces/hubs in town centres for workers to use Welsh during the working day e.g. informal, ‘water cooler’ conversations. Such spaces may also present good networking opportunities for collaboration within the local economy of these areas with high percentages of Welsh-speakers.
20. Despite the potential opportunity mentioned above, the ability to relocate to Welsh-speaking areas is also open to a much wider market of non-Welsh-speakers from elsewhere in Wales and further afield. Any increases in professionals and their families relocating to Welsh-speaking areas would accelerate the downward trend in terms of the percentage of the population in these areas able to speak Welsh. This would also create a challenge for the education system with higher numbers of children requiring late Welsh language immersion in order to integrate into local schools in a way that does not change the language and linguistic character of those schools. Investing in the network of language immersion centres – which provide an intensive language offer for a term before children join the local school – will be crucial in this regard. There will also be an important role for the Welsh for adults sector as a core service in new co-working spaces to provide opportunities for people to learn the language.

Increasing the number of people who learn and use the Welsh language

21. Nationally, lockdown provided a period of reflection with regard to **Welsh-medium education**, reminding us of the important role of parents in supporting our children’s education. The need for a more tailored package of

support for parents of children in Welsh-medium education who may not themselves speak Welsh became evident and work with partners to develop this support has begun. Our Welsh-medium schools reflect the complex nature of our linguistic demography in Wales, which sometimes requires different, tailored and additional support. We need to ensure there is a system-wide appreciation and understanding of what bilingualism means with regard to how children acquire language skills in both English and Welsh in Welsh-medium schools. This needs to include regular communication with parents regarding bilingualism – and our '[Summer full of Welsh](#)' campaign kick-started this process.

22. We are now entering a period of expansion at an unprecedented rate driven by our *Cymraeg 2050* strategy that includes a target of 40% of learners being educated in Welsh-medium schools by 2050. Our medium term target is ensuring 30% of learners in Welsh-medium education by 2031 (in 2018/19, 22.8% of 7-year-old pupils were in Welsh-medium education). We have not seen any evidence that the lockdown home schooling experience has led to parents deciding to move their children out of Welsh-medium education over and above the usual rate. However, we are concerned that the pandemic will have an overall effect of slowing down the rate of growth given potential parental decisions but more significantly a lack of focus by local authorities given other priorities at present. This will require close monitoring, especially if there is the possibility of future lockdowns.
23. At a **community level** the Welsh Language Use Sub-group of the Welsh Language Partnership Council has commissioned a community survey into the impact of the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 on volunteering through the medium of Welsh and use of the Welsh language. The results will inform further consideration by the sub-group on actions that need to be taken by the Welsh Government and the Mentrau Iaith (third sector local language initiatives) to draw up policies in order to safeguard opportunities to use Welsh at a community level in the future.
24. In addition to the earlier points in this paper, a key challenge for the **Welsh for Adults** sector will be to seize the opportunity given by the record number of people who signed up to learn Welsh during lockdown. Community providers are now delivering blended learning courses – using a mix of online classes with tutors, and online resources that learners can access when it suits them. A partnership has been formed between the National Centre for Learning Welsh and the online provider, *Say something in Welsh* that makes it easier for learners to switch from one provider to the other, and provides a wider suite of resources to learners.

Conclusion

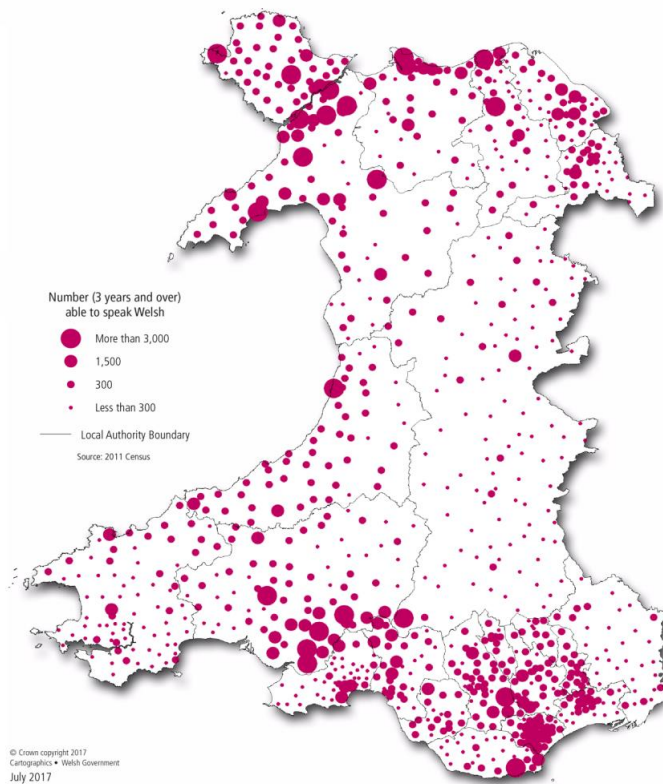
25. This paper has provided a brief overview of the challenges envisaged for the Welsh language in the medium-long term, highlighting the inextricable links between socio-economic factors and the use of the language.

26. For our strategy to succeed maintaining our Welsh-speaking communities is key, and achieving this will require a cross-Government recognition of their significance. This will require more than completing impact assessments. The Welsh Language Division is developing our language planning capacity to support Directorates with tackling policy issues that are of strategic importance to *Cymraeg 2050*. This is not about compliance; rather we wish to work together across Directorates on taking positive action.
27. The next 5-year *Cymraeg 2050* Work Programmes will be shaped by our response to Brexit and the pandemic, and our ambition is for this to be a cross-Government endeavour. This cross-Government work has already commenced through three sub-groups (Education, Economy, Communities) of the Welsh Language Partnership Council, and overseen by the *Cymraeg 2050* Programme Board.

Welsh Language Division
September 2020

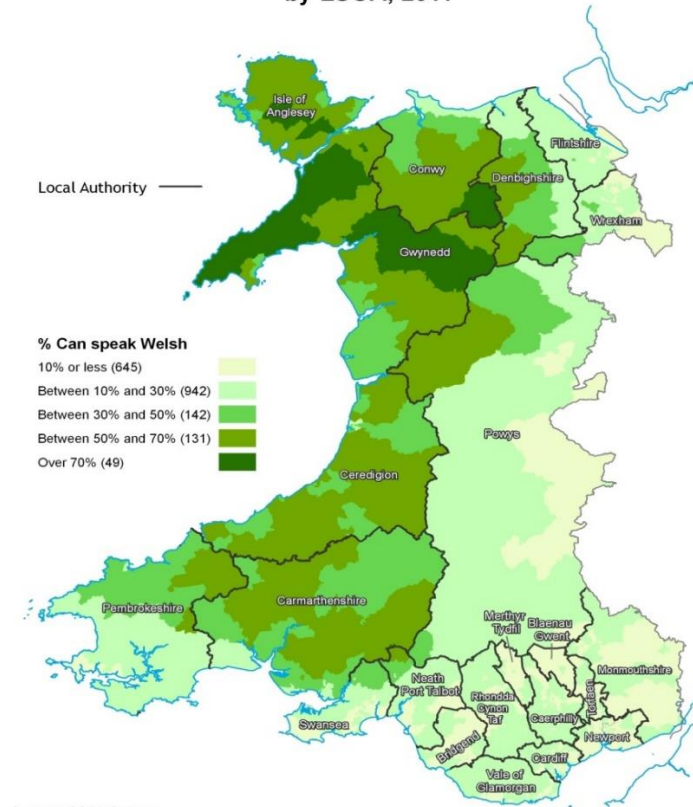
Annex 1: Distribution of Welsh speakers across Wales

**Number able to speak Welsh
by community, 2011**



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July 2017
OGL

**Proportion of people (aged 3 and over) able to speak Welsh,
by LSOA, 2011**



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