

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sports, and International Relations Committee on the Legislative framework that supports Welsh-medium Education provision.

I would like to thank the members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sports, and International Relations Committee for their report on the Legislative framework that supports Welsh-medium Education provision. I am particularly pleased to see the Committee's recommendations are in line with our current and future plans.

Several of the Report's recommendations, however, relate to proposals set out in our White Paper for a Welsh Language Education Bill which we consulted on between March – June this year. As this Report was published in May, I will need to consider the Report's recommendations as part of the post-consultation analysis, and it is for this reason some recommendations have been 'accepted in principle'.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government urgently commissions a rapid review of transport policies of each local authority in Wales to identify the areas which inhibit access to Welsh-medium education provision. The review should also recommend what support is required to address the issue in the short term and whether or not further primary legislation is required to fix it in the long term. Should the Welsh Government be of the view that the review of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 is the most appropriate way of doing this, then it should take into account this issue.

Response: Accept

As part of the ongoing Review of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 all local authorities and FE Institutions in Wales have been asked to provide details of their learner transport policies to understand the costs, delivery models and any barriers, challenges as well as opportunities to improve transport provision for all learners with a specific focus on Welsh-medium education. Analysis of these responses will inform short, medium and long-term policy options that will be subject to Ministerial approval and wider consultation prior to implementation.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government work with key stakeholders to identify suitable measures that would improve existing arrangements for monitoring the progression of WESPs.

This should include exploring the possibility of an organisation, independent from Government, to have a greater role in monitoring local authority WESP progress.

Response: Accept

Proposals set out in the *White Paper consultation: proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill*, address the need to improve existing arrangements for monitoring the progression of WESPs. Our proposal is to give Estyn a role of conducting a rapid review of local authority plans in situations where there could be a risk that an authority may not meet its targets.

Financial Implications: We consulted on an initial outline of the costs and impacts of the proposals set out in the White Paper: proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill. It presents the initial stages of gathering evidence to support an assessment of the costs, benefits and disadvantages associated with the proposed changes, and is a starting point that provides an opportunity to consider the types of costs that will arise and who will bear the costs, based on the current proposals. The nature of the provisions means that the information on costs, benefits and disadvantages will continue to develop as these provisions change in light of the feedback on the White Paper consultation. We will work with our stakeholders to develop a Regulatory Impact Assessment, which will be laid alongside the Bill when it is introduced into the Senedd.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government ensures that forthcoming primary legislation on Welsh language education includes measures that will allow it to monitor the progress of local authority Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. This should include measures that allow Welsh Ministers to intervene and take action, if required, where it is apparent local authorities have failed to meet their targets.

Response: Accept

Proposals set out in the *White Paper consultation: proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill*, provide a firmer basis for the planning and delivery of Welsh in education both nationally (through the National Plan for the acquisition and learning of Welsh) and locally (through the proposed Welsh in Education Implementation Plans).

The proposal that Estyn are given a role of conducting a rapid review of a local authority provides further opportunity to ensure action taken by the Welsh Ministers to monitor progress is appropriate. Crucially, it should also be seen as a way of identifying what support local authorities need in order to make progress. Section 21 of the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 already provides Welsh Ministers with powers to intervene if there is sufficient evidence the grounds for intervention have been met.

Financial Implications: We consulted on an initial outline of the costs and impacts of the proposals set out in the Regulatory Impact Assessment has been prepared as part of the *White Paper consultation: proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill*. It presents the initial stages of gathering evidence to support an assessment of the costs, benefits and disadvantages associated with the proposed changes, and is a starting point that provides an opportunity to consider the types of costs that will arise and who will bear the costs, based on the current proposals. The nature of the provisions means that the information on costs, benefits and disadvantages will continue to develop as these provisions change in light of the feedback on the White Paper consultation.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that:

The development of a national framework to ensure a consistent national approach to Welsh language education planning and delivery.

Response: Accept

In our White Paper consultation, we propose to place a duty on the Welsh Ministers to produce a National Plan for the acquisition and learning of Welsh, and to review it in each Senedd term.

Financial Implications: We consulted on an initial outline of the costs and impacts of the proposals set out in the *White Paper: proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill*. It presents the initial stages of gathering evidence to support an assessment of the costs, benefits and disadvantages associated with the proposed changes, and is a starting point that provides an opportunity to consider the types of costs that will arise and who will bear the costs, based on the current proposals. The nature of the provisions means that the information on costs, benefits and disadvantages will continue to develop as these provisions change in light of the feedback on the White Paper. We will work with our stakeholders to develop a Regulatory Impact Assessment, which will be laid alongside the Bill when it is introduced into the Senedd.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government undertakes a short review to identify the time periods within the 10-year cycle which require additional monitoring and targets. Once identified, the Welsh Government should consider how this can be accommodated within the appraisal method for progression made against WESPs. The short review should also consider whether these issues should be included in the Government's forthcoming Welsh Language Education Bill.

Response: Reject

The White Paper proposal to place a duty on the Welsh Ministers to publish a National Plan for the acquisition and learning of Welsh introduces a new 'review' point before the end of each Senedd term. This means that during the 10-year local planning cycle for the proposed Welsh in Education Implementation Plans (WEIPs), there will be a 5-year review point in addition to the annual review reporting requirements.

As the White Paper proposals provide new opportunities to review and refine the assessment and monitoring arrangements, the Welsh Government does not consider the undertaking of a short review to be necessary nor an efficient use of resources at this time.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government review new measures for encouraging and supporting cultural change in local authorities towards the benefits of developing Welsh language education in their area. Following this review, the Welsh Government should consider which of these functions should be placed on a statutory footing and included in their forthcoming Welsh Language Education Bill.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government's Academi Wales and Cymraeg 2050 Divisions have developed a *Leading in a Bilingual Country* programme. This brings together senior leaders from all over Wales to discuss how exactly they can lead their organisations in a way which will embed the spirit and letter of *Cymraeg 2050*, our long-term strategy for the Welsh language. The programme tackles organisational culture change using a hearts and minds approach. We are currently preparing a 5-year rollout for this programme and will review how best to target prospective attendees who could contribute to implementing this recommendation in local authorities.

Local authorities already required to prepare a 5-year Welsh language strategy outlining how they will promote the use of the Welsh language within their area. Whilst this is broader than education, alignment between Local authority Welsh language strategies and WESPs is expected, as outlined in the [Guidance on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans](#).

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government maintains a dedicated Welsh-medium education capital fund within the Sustainable Communities for Learning budget, in addition to the support Welsh-medium projects receive from the general fund.

Response: Accept in Principle

In August 2022, I approved a new approach to capital funding as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme with a move away from fixed funding windows (currently referred to as bands) to a more flexible rolling programme. Each local authority is required to submit a new strategic outline programme (SOP) by March 2024. Each SOP will be supported by a 9-year capital investment plan. This will provide the opportunity to ensure their long-term investment plan is fully aligned with their WESP targets to ensure the required investment is in place to support the targets within their plan.

This will reduce the need for 100% grant funding to be deployed to fund major capital infrastructure as these projects would need to form part of the 9-year investment plans. This would allow any future 100% grant funding to be targeted to fund priority Welsh-medium projects, such as childcare, immersion, additional learning needs, temporary buildings for seedling schools and adult education.

Financial Implications: Since 2018 over £112m has been invested in dedicated Welsh-medium Capital grants. This includes increased costs to deliver the approved Welsh-Medium Capital Grant projects due to increased construction costs. This funding is on top of any investment through Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

A further allocation of £15m has been included as part of the draft budget for 2024-25 with advice currently being developed to support additional priority projects on the reserve list.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government reviews the role of Fora in the process of developing and monitoring WESPs, and to assess the varying structures and impact of Fora across Wales.

Response: Accept

[The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans \(Wales\) Regulations 2019](#) introduced a new requirement for local authorities to set out in their plans how the authority worked in partnership with its Welsh in education planning forum (if established in the local authority's area) to prepare the authority's plan and how the forum will oversee its implementation and evaluation. Part 3 of the [Guidance on Welsh in Education](#)

[Strategic Plans](#) provided information around what local authorities should be thinking of when working with their forums / stakeholders.

Whilst local authority stakeholder engagement (individually or through their forums) during the preparation of their current WESPs had never been greater, some forums and local authorities found this partnership work more challenging than others. On that basis a review to assess the role, structures and impact of Fora across Wales could be beneficial to inform future planning.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government place Welsh in Education Planning Forums on a statutory footing, ensuring each local authority in Wales has a Forum in place to advise and monitor the authority's WESP progress.

Response: Accept in part

We accept that there are clear advantages to authorities working in partnership with their Welsh in Education Planning Forums and they play a central role in supporting local authorities make progress on their WESPs. Each local authority should therefore have a Forum to advise and monitor. We do not however accept that there is evidence that making forums statutory would improve local planning. No proposals were put forward in the White Paper in relation to placing Welsh in Education Planning Forums on a statutory footing, however the Welsh Government agrees with the Report recommendations (8 and 10) that a review of the current structures and impact of Welsh in Education Planning Forums as well as a developing a National framework to improve consistency across Wales would be beneficial.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government develops a national framework for Welsh in Education Planning Forums, ensuring a consistent and purposeful structure across Wales.

Response: Accept

In light of the Welsh Government's commitment to review and assess the role, structures and impact of Fora across Wales in response to recommendation 8, we will consider what support is needed to enable more consistent, positive and effective working between local authorities and their Welsh in Education Planning

Forums. This may include the publishing of additional guidance and opportunities for local authorities and forum members from all over Wales to share good practice.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government supports and facilitates closer working between local authorities and partners in the early-years and Post-16 sectors to develop Welsh language provision locally.

Response: Accept

The White Paper proposals relating to the National Plan for the acquisition and learning of Welsh provides the platform to improve planning of Welsh in Education, from the early years right through to adulthood.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that:

Local authorities should be required to consult and collaborate with early-years and Post-16 education providers both within their local areas and across the region in the development of future Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

Response: Accept

Local authorities should already be consulting and collaborating with early years and post-16 providers in relation to their WESPs. We know that where there are Welsh in Education Planning Forums, Mudiad Meithrin, for example, is an active and valuable member.

Provisions in section 84(4)(d) of the [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) already requires local authorities to consult with institutions within the further education sector in its area in their preparation of WESPs, or revised WESPs. Additional requirements in the [Welsh in Education Strategic Plans \(Wales\) Regulations 2019](#) require local authorities to set out in their plans (1) how it will support the continued provision of Welsh medium education for persons in year 10 and above by working collaboratively with other schools and FEIs if necessary, and (2) how it will work with its schools and FEIs (if necessary) to co-ordinate the provision of Welsh as a subject to persons in year 10 and above in its maintained secondary schools.

As with our response to recommendation 11, proposals in the White Paper relating to the National Plan for the acquisition and learning of Welsh, and also the Welsh language skills continuum to be used by providers in the early years, statutory and post-16 sectors, will support consistency in the planning and provision of Welsh language learning across all ages. We will consider this recommendation further as part of the development of the Bill.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, along with local authorities and key partners must develop and improve robust and effective data collection measures to support the development of a bilingual workforce.

Response: Accept

The proposals in the White Paper are to impose duties on local authorities to plan their workforce, which included providing guidance to ensure consistency across all authorities.

The School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) collects information on the Welsh language skills of teachers, support staff and leaders in local authority-maintained school settings and their ability to teach/work through the medium of Welsh. Individuals record their Welsh language skills level against the [Welsh language competency framework for education practitioners](#). The SWAC collects information at an individual level which enables the analysis of information against a number of staff and school characteristics, as well as looking at changes over time.

To improve the quality of data available to local authorities and ensure consistency in how it is used, the Welsh Government has worked with local authorities during 2022-23 to analyse SWAC data. This work has resulted in guidance for local authorities and schools on the use of the SWAC to support the implementation of Welsh in education strategic plans. We will continue to work with local authorities and key partners to review and refine the guidance.

Financial Implications: We provided grant funding of £40,000 to local authorities to support the work of developing the guidance. There will be no on-going cost to the refinement of the guidance.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government to ensure that the nursery workforce is represented in the School Workforce Annual Census survey in future years to improve data collection and analysis of Welsh language skills across the pre-statutory sector.

Response: Reject

The School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC) only collects information on teachers and support staff in local authority-maintained school settings in line with the Education (Supply of Information about the School Workforce) (Wales) Regulations 2017.

While some non-maintained settings, more commonly known as childcare settings, may be funded to deliver nursery education, the staff within those settings sit within the social care workforce. There is no formal census in relation to the childcare workforce and there are currently no plans to establish one.

The childcare and playwork workforce are unregistered and so cannot be reached individually, but only via their settings/workplace. In addition, not all settings are required to register with Care Inspectorate Wales which makes reaching them to conduct a census extremely difficult. There are a number of actions required before we would be in a position to consider establishing a census akin to the SWAC, and given the nature of the sector and workforce it is unlikely that any such census would produce data of the same robustness in the initial few years.

However, Care Inspectorate Wales does collect some data on the language medium of settings and the skills of staff in their Self-Assessment of Service Survey. In 2023 this showed that 15 percent of settings used Welsh as their main language of operation, with a further 10 percent of settings using both English and Welsh. An estimated 23 percent of all staff working in childcare and play services were fluent in Welsh, and a further 14 percent could speak a fair amount of Welsh.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government explores the feasibility of a Welsh-medium accreditation system for teachers who teach through the medium of Welsh. This would ensure that teachers have the skills to teach through the medium of Welsh where the linguistic and cultural needs of each school or area are different. This should include the need to look at how courses are designed and how teachers are trained to teach Welsh in English medium settings.

Response: Accept in part

Our aim is to support all practitioners to be the best they can through high-quality initial teacher education (ITE) and a continued programme of professional learning. We agree that teachers who teach through the medium of Welsh should of course have the requisite skills to do so effectively.

There has been significant reform to ITE in recent years. The accreditation criteria that ITE Partnerships are required to meet in order to deliver ITE in Wales have recently been revised. The new criteria require partnerships to be clear about activity

included in their programmes for the development of the Welsh language in three ways:

1. All Partnerships should develop a clear strategy for the approach they will take to the development of provision for the promotion and use of the Welsh language.
2. ITE Partnerships should have clear plans for provision that affords all student teachers the opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills in accordance with the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership.
3. ITE programmes for students intending to work in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools should include the following minimum requirements (amongst others):
 - support for students to develop the pedagogic skills and methodologies related to learning and teaching through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, preparing them to teach relevant subjects / Areas of Learning and Experience and age ranges.
 - support for student teachers to develop strategies to normalise the use of Welsh and embed Welsh language across the curriculum.

In addition, the Welsh in education workforce plan includes a specific objective to deliver a national programme of professional learning to develop effective teaching and learning of Welsh and subjects through the medium of Welsh.

We do not however agree with the need for a separate accreditation process for Welsh-medium teachers as this could be perceived as an additional barrier to entering the profession. Our approach will be to provide high quality support and professional learning from ITE through on-going career development as outlined above, and in line with our National Approach to Professional Learning.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government along with key partners explore the potential to integrate elements of the Sabbatical Scheme into Initial Teacher Training programmes to immerse and upskill the Welsh language skills of trainee teachers.

Response: Accept

As outlined in response to Recommendation 15, all initial teacher education (ITE) Partnerships should have clear plans for provision that affords all student teachers the opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills in accordance with the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership.

The Sabbatical Scheme has been designed to enable practitioners to be released from school to develop their Welsh language skills and ability to teach Welsh or through the medium of Welsh. The courses are intensive and vary in duration based on their level from 5 weeks to a full year.

It is a matter for ITE Partnerships to consider the best models for ensuring that student Teachers can develop their Welsh language skills. The challenge for ITE Partnerships is to find the time to provide the intensive language support within a programme that has many other requirements. However, some partnerships work with the sabbatical scheme providers to share practice and have piloted intensive blocks within the year. The National Centre for Learning Welsh can also offer support the ITE Partnerships in this area.

Welsh Government will be bringing ITE Partnerships and other key partners together in due course to consider effective models in providing Welsh language support to student teachers so that these can be considered as they revise their programmes in line with the new accreditation criteria.

Financial Implications: None.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government needs to invest substantially in upskilling the current teaching workforce, providing greater numbers of teachers, teaching assistants and lecturers with the opportunity to undertake the Sabbatical Scheme.

Response: Accept

We outlined proposals in the White Paper for a Welsh language education Bill to impose duties on local authorities to plan their workforce and set targets for increasing the number of practitioners with Welsh language skills based on analysis of the relevant data in the SWAC. Understanding the development needs of practitioners in terms of language skills within each local authority would enable us to better target funding and ensure that local authorities and schools are planning strategically to develop the language skills of their workforce.

We are working with regional consortia and local authorities to ensure that practitioners are identified and supported to engage with professional learning in order to improve the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools and to support all schools to move along a continuum.

The Welsh in education workforce plan includes a specific objective to deliver a national programme of professional learning to enable all practitioners, including supply teachers and teaching assistants, to continually develop their Welsh language skills in accordance with the expectation in the professional standards. Current support includes:

- £3.6m is allocated to the Sabbatical Scheme annually to deliver intensive Welsh language and language teaching methodology professional learning for practitioners. Courses are available on a range of levels for teaching assistants and teachers. The majority of this budget funds the supply costs related with releasing practitioners from schools to undertake the courses.

Approximately 200 practitioners complete Sabbatical Scheme courses annually.

- £2.5m is allocated to the regional consortia and local authorities to support the local and regional delivery of Welsh language and Welsh-medium support for practitioners. This is in addition to the recently re-established Welsh in Education Grant (WEG), which is a total of £4.5m and 33% local authority match funding. WEG funding can be used by local authorities to support:
 - latecomer and late immersion centres.
 - linguistic progression projects and subject / methodology training for the Welsh-medium schools, and
 - the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools, either through athrawon bro or through the regional consortia.
- Funding allocated to the National Centre for Learning Welsh also supports the delivery of Welsh language lessons free of charge to all education practitioners.

Financial Implications: Funding currently available to support Welsh in education includes:

- £3.6m for the Sabbatical Scheme
- £7m to local authorities and regional consortia

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should consider whether the Sabbatical Scheme could be expanded to some early-years practitioners in Wales supporting Welsh-medium provision in the sector, or to promote and expand the Learn Welsh Scheme for Early Years Education and Childcare through Dysgu Cymraeg.

Response: Accept

With regards to childcare settings, Welsh Government provide funding to the National Centre for Learning Welsh and Cwlwm partners to improve the skills and confidence of those working in Welsh Medium, bilingual and English medium settings.

Our funding provides each Cwlwm partner with a dedicated development officer to promote use of the Welsh language and support childcare and playwork settings to increase opportunities for existing staff to improve their Welsh language skills. In addition, we have funded Cwlwm partners to undertake specific work to increase the numbers studying childcare qualifications through the medium of Welsh, to work with Welsh medium play and after school clubs to train in playwork qualifications to support expansion of registered services and to increase the support provided to new Welsh medium settings, as well as provide support for Welsh medium childminders.

We continue to consider the effectiveness of these schemes and will provide further support as appropriate. We will work with Cwlwm partners and childcare and play settings to consider whether a sabbatical system would work in this context.

Financial Implications: We provide funding of £3.78 million through Cwlwm over three years (from 2022-23 to 2024-25) to support and grow Welsh-medium provision and practitioners in Wales. This includes funding to provide an additional 100 recruits to undertake Welsh-medium Level 3 childcare qualifications and an additional 50 recruits to undertake Welsh-medium Level 5 childcare qualifications through Mudiad Meithrin.

Any potential expansion of the Sabbatical Scheme to early-years practitioners would be a new financial commitment and be subject to budget availability noting the severely constrained fiscal context.

**Jeremy Miles MS,
Minister for Education and Welsh Language**