

Pwyllgor Menter a Dysgu
Enterprise and Learning Committee
Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
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Alun Ffred Jones AM
Minister for Heritage
Welsh Assembly Government

1 February 2011

Annwyl Alun

**Response to Welsh Assembly Government
Consultation document
A living language: A language for living**

As Chair of the National Assembly for Wales's Enterprise and Learning Committee, may I welcome the Welsh Government's draft strategy for the Welsh language. I share the vision to increase the use of Welsh in the community, amongst children and young people, in the workplace and in services to the citizen.

As you are aware, the Enterprise and Learning Committee has undertaken an inquiry into bilingualism in Wales and has published two reports: 'The teaching and acquisition of Welsh as a second language' and 'Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public', which are enclosed with this letter.

Some of the key findings of our inquiry are relevant to your consultation on the Welsh language strategy 'A living language: A language for living' and we therefore wish to make this submission so that they can be incorporated into your final strategy document.

You will also be aware that the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning responded to our report on the teaching and acquisition of Welsh as a second language, which was debated by the Assembly on 1 December 2010. A debate on our report on Bilingual training in the workplace and business interface with the public will take place before the dissolution of the third Assembly.

4.1 The Value of Welsh

We welcome the Government's objective to see better marketing of the language to young people and that there is a desire to commission initiatives to make young people more aware of the value of bilingual skills in later life.

Evidence we received on the teaching and acquisition of Welsh as a second language identified acquisition planning as the bedrock of language planning in addition to the inter-generational transmission of a language (parents

passing their language onto their children) and second language learning in education. We also received evidence stating that a lack of family language reproduction is the direct cause of a language shift, which often results in the minority language fading out over two or three generations. Language acquisition planning is partly about encouraging parents to raise their children bilingually.

Recommendation 14 in our report on the teaching and acquisition of Welsh as a second language stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government explore ways of working with the Welsh Language Board, the WJEC and the Urdd to promote the benefits of the Welsh language effectively amongst non-Welsh speaking parents, particularly the significant number of parents who are reluctant to encourage their children to learn Welsh.

During our visit to a training provider which offers Welsh-medium vocational training, we had the opportunity to speak to a number of people learning Welsh in the workplace. They stated that amongst young people, perceptions of the Welsh language were not on a par with English. This view was shared by the Welsh Language Board which has also heard from young people in education that Welsh was not seen to be as “cool” as English. The Board believe that there was a need to ‘normalise’ the use of Welsh in predominantly English speaking areas and to have a positive and appealing portrayal of the language in the media.

Recommendation 5 in our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government commission further research and collate data on the usage of and attitude towards the Welsh language by young people going into employment in order to inform policy development.

5.2.1 Welsh Assembly Government

A proposed aim in your consultation document is to introduce, through the Welsh Language Measure, Welsh language standards.

The input of the Welsh Language Board was crucial to our inquiry. We valued the Board’s experience in implementing Welsh Language Schemes and it is imperative that the experience gained by the Board in implementing those schemes is utilised to its full potential by the Welsh Language Commissioner when implementing the new Welsh language standards.

We welcome the Government’s objective to establish the office of the Welsh Language Commissioner. Many of the recommendations in our reports will need to be addressed by the Commissioner and his/her advisory panel.

In our report on the teaching and acquisition of Welsh as a second language, we recommended that the views of schools in Wales should be represented on the proposed Welsh Language Commissioner’s Advisory Panel. We also recommended in our report on Bilingual training in the

workplace and business interface with the public that the views of consumers in Wales should also be represented on the panel.

5.2.2 Local Government

Your consultation document highlights the lack of employment opportunities for young people and migration to urban areas as a key factor in the decline of the language in Welsh speaking heartlands. We are pleased to note that the Government will continue to support the work of the Language-Economy Discussion Group.

We welcome the Government's proposed aim to explore what can be done to improve the visibility of the language.

We received evidence stating that bilingual signage is important for language profile. Visible use of Welsh raises the prestige and status of the language. This is particularly important where it is used by well-regarded businesses and is a part of respected brands. Bilingual signage also invites and encourages people to use Welsh in their interaction with a business. We believe that further work to encourage more organisations and businesses to adopt bilingual signage would contribute to 'normalising' the use of Welsh.

We also received evidence which stated that there was a general lack of Welsh language use in the built environment, in the media and business. We believe that customer-facing small and medium sized businesses in our major cities and towns need to embrace the Welsh language to enhance the tourism industry as many visitors find it appealing to hear and see the language being used. We believe that local authorities have a role in ensuring that small local businesses exploit more opportunities to enhance and develop Welsh language signage in their business premises.

Recommendation 16 in our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government commission research into the use of bilingual signs and literature in workplaces and businesses including collating accurate data on the use of Welsh signs and literature and informing the Welsh Language Board and the Welsh Language Commissioner of trends and examples of good practice.

5.4 Private Sector

We are pleased that you wish to see more voluntary Welsh language policies in the private sector and an increase in the amount of face-to-face services available through the medium of Welsh.

The Committee acknowledges however that there is some good work being undertaken by some customer-facing organisations, particularly in the financial sector.

Recommendation 9 in our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government commission research into the benefits that financial institutions have found in providing a bilingual service to their customers, and explore ways in which this good practice can be promoted to other customer service organisations in the private sector.

Some stakeholders raised concerns that work-based documentation, the visual environment and IT based resources are mostly in English which makes working through the medium of Welsh extremely difficult. In many cases, Welsh speakers tend to deal with matters in English in the first instance as it is the easiest and quickest option.

The Welsh Language Board's 'Promoting and Facilitating Bilingual Workplaces' provides advice to organisations on how to promote the internal use of Welsh and contains guidance on producing policy statements, objectives, language awareness and building on skills. We felt that this guidance and support could go some way to creating a bilingual internal culture in organisations for both the public and private sectors.

Recommendations 14 and 15 of our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government evaluate the outcome of the 'Promoting and Facilitating Bilingual Workplaces' guidance and share examples of good practice to develop the Welsh language further in those workplaces and with other organisations.

We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that the evidence gathered by the Welsh Language Board to develop a network of businesses and public sector bodies is used to share good practice in developing Welsh language provision in the workplace. We also recommend that the operation of this network should be regularly monitored and evaluated.

5.6 Welsh in the Workplace

We welcome the Government's aim to ensure that there is a coherent pathway through education and training to the workplace. We agree that pupils and parents should receive meaningful and consistent messages about the value of Welsh language skills.

Evidence provided by all stakeholders for both parts of our inquiry highlighted the need for continuity between each Key Stage of education through to further and higher education and training and into the workplace.

Recommendation 2 in our report on the teaching and acquisition of Welsh as a second language stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government consider assessing the languages skills of all pupils earlier in Key Stage 2. We also recommend that the Welsh Government commission research into the current levels of language continuity from one Key Stage to the next and what measures can be taken to address existing problems in transition.

Throughout our inquiry we heard that problems with language continuity extend into employment. Key features of the evidence that we received related to the development of linguistic skills in Welsh and that was the need for a planned transition from education to employment.

Recommendations 6 and 7 in our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government work with its partners to ensure that there is a coherent pathway through to training and employment for pupils from schools who wish to use their Welsh language skills in the workplace.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that there is effective and strategic communication between education, training providers and workplaces to ensure that all stages of the skills development process provide individuals with continuity and that the needs of the workplace are met.

We heard that the Welsh Language Board has administered a 'Bilingual Workplaces Scheme' to give financial and practical support to public bodies for pilot projects to develop new and innovative approaches to develop Welsh in the workplace and in 2009/2010 supported applications from nine organisations.

We also received evidence stating that some organisations are unaware of the linguistic skills available in their workforce and that those skills are not utilised to their full potential.

We heard that there is a need for clear and co-ordinated strategies for collating and disseminating information on careers where Welsh language skills are required. This would involve marketing Welsh as a work-related skill to employers and to pupils in secondary education.

In an attempt to understand more about the factors that influence Welsh in the workplace, the Welsh Language Board is undertaking a Research Plan giving particular attention to language skills and how those skills are put into practice.

Recommendation 3 in our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government work closely with the Welsh Language Board to evaluate the outcome of its Research Plan. With the evidence gathered from this research, we recommend that the Welsh Government issue guidance on the commercial benefits of utilising staff with Welsh speaking skills to large multi-national organisations and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Wales.

6.1 Reading, Watching and Listening

We welcome the Government's proposed aim to consider developing additional interactive digital media resources in Welsh with a focus on the needs of children and young people. We also welcome the Welsh Government's aim to collaborate with broadcasters to ensure that their content can contribute to the delivery of the strategy.

Evidence that we received from the WJEC stated that Welsh teachers often encourage pupils to watch S4C to develop their Welsh medium skills. This point was also emphasised by the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Unit which stated that although S4C provides Welsh language learning DVDs which consists of short clips of programmes specifically for schools, the television station can often be inaccessible to young people learning Welsh and that some programmes do not have the cultural popularity to attract young people. They also argued that S4C should provide more opportunities for those under 18 to learn Welsh through the television channel and that more opportunities should be created for Welsh second language learners at all levels.

Recommendation 15 in our report on the teaching of Welsh as a second language stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government collaborate with S4C and the WJEC to develop new Welsh second language learning programmes which incorporate popular culture and are relevant to modern society. We also recommend that these programmes be broadcast through all media outlets available to S4C to ensure that Welsh second language learners have instant access to learning resources.

6.5 Research and Data

We are pleased to note that the Welsh Government acknowledges that there is a need for regular language use surveys to monitor attitudes towards Welsh and its usage. Evidence provided by the Welsh Language Board stated that the lack of accurate data needed to be addressed, in particular the inconsistencies in collating birth data from all authorities. We heard that in order for local authorities to meet demand for Welsh-medium education, access to accurate birth data was critical.

Recommendation 19 in our report on Bilingual training and skills in the workplace and business interface with the public stated that:

We recommend that the Welsh Government issue directives to local education authorities to ensure that they provide the Welsh Language Board and then the Welsh Language Commissioner with the necessary data, in particular birth data, to measure demand for Welsh language education services.

Finally, the National Assembly for Wales's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee published a joint report with the Culture Committee 'Our language: Its future - Policy review of the Welsh language' in 2002. Many of the findings in that joint report bear similarities to the conclusions of our inquiry into bilingualism. It is disappointing that nine years on, we are rehearsing the same concerns. My Committee therefore hopes that the Welsh Language Strategy will address these points to ensure that these issues will not be raised as a concern by future Committees.

We intend in due course to publish this letter on our web-site and we look forward to receiving the Welsh Government's response to our report on Bilingual training in the workplace and business interface with the public, and of course a debate in plenary.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gareth', written in a cursive style.

Gareth Jones AM
Committee Chair