

# **Communicating in Welsh – An essential skill for all**

## **Response to the Welsh second language education review – Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg**

### **Viewpoint**

**The Welsh language belongs to every person in Wales. In our view, to deprive an individual of the essential skill of being able to communicate and discuss his/her work through the medium of Welsh is an educational failure. No one in contemporary Wales should be placed at a disadvantage, and so we are therefore calling for a timetable to be drawn up in to ensure that every individual gains the skill of fluency in Welsh.**

A declaration should be made immediately that there is an intention to bring "Welsh second language" to an end, and to ensure in its stead an immediate move towards a system where every pupil will receive part of his/her education through the medium of Welsh. This would be in addition to studying Welsh as a subject so that each pupil has the ability to work through the medium of Welsh.

In the Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg's view, the right to live our lives through the medium of Welsh should not be limited to those who are fortunate enough to attend designated Welsh schools, be that because of a parent's wish or a geographical accident. No system should deprive any child of his/her basic right to be able to live his/her life through the medium of Welsh.

### **Review**

Cymdeithas welcomes the existence of the Review Group, and also welcomes the Minister's acknowledgement, at its establishment, of the shortfalls of the present 'Welsh second language' system. There are no two ways about it: the present model of 'Welsh second language' is failing, and this review therefore provides an opportunity for the beginnings of a radical change in the Welsh education system. In our view, the essence of the failure is the whole concept of Welsh as a 'second language', and so the Minister's request that one should consider "how to raise the status of Welsh second language as a subject" is erroneous.

Government statistics show that the percentage of pupils assessed in Welsh first language in Year 9 is 16.8%, less than the Welsh-speaking percentage of the whole population according to the Census results. At the moment, therefore, the education system is responsible for managing the decline of the Welsh language and for continuing to deprive the vast majority of the population in Wales of the opportunity to speak it. This is wholly contrary to the Government's policy.

### **Aim**

At the moment, due to the differences in the education authorities' policies, there is considerable variation from area to area in terms of the opportunities for young people to learn to speak Welsh to a practical, useful level. Although the aim throughout Wales is ultimately one and the same – that every person in Wales should leave school able to live and work through the medium of Welsh – it will be necessary to operate differently according to the current situation in each area.

**In areas where Welsh-medium primary education has become the norm for every pupil, the initial priorities will be as follows:**

- (1) Establishing systems to continue with this norm up to the secondary sector and ages 14-19 by:
  - a. increasing the number of secondary schools that teach at least 80% of the curriculum to all pupils through the medium of Welsh
  - b. designing programmes to change 2B secondary schools to 2A schools by registering all pupils from Welsh-medium primary schools by default in a Welsh stream
- (2) Establishing an arrangement that will at least be as effective as Gwynedd's present arrangements for integrating latecomers in special centres before their return to their community schools;
- (3) Establishing an emergency programme that will ensure that the primary and secondary English schools in these counties begin to provide part of their curriculum through the medium of Welsh (further ideas in the next section) so that there is less incentive for parents to move children from their locality to such a secondary school;
- (4) Ensuring that colleges do not award successful completions of courses without proof of the student's ability to accomplish his/her work through the medium of Welsh;
- (5) Ensuring that colleges and private providers respect the language policies of the schools in which they arrange courses.

**In other counties and areas in Wales, progressing towards acknowledging and fulfilling the basic right of all young people in Wales to use the Welsh language will be made as follows:**

- (1) Extending the network of dedicated Welsh-medium schools so that parents have the choice and practical ability to ensure that their children can be fully immersed in Welsh;
- (2) Abolishing "Welsh second language" as a subject. All students will study "Welsh" in the same way that they study "English", aiming at different degrees of proficiency in Welsh;
- (3) In schools other than dedicated Welsh-medium schools (in both the primary and secondary sectors, although the initial emphasis might be on primary), moves should be afoot within the next year to begin introducing part of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh. Physical Education and Technology are examples of where a start could be made. At primary level, it is proposed that "Local" Studies be taught through the medium of Welsh in order to root pupils' attachment to the language of the locality. In this way, every pupil will become able to use the Welsh language. The ultimate aim is a system where every school teaches a minimum of 30% of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh. Therefore, in areas well-populated enough to offer a choice between models, that choice would be between schools teaching 80%-100% of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh and those teaching 30%. The costly and ineffective system of Welsh and English streams studying the same subjects side by side in the same school would come to an end. To deprive a pupil of the skill to undertake work through the medium of Welsh would not be an option, in the same way that it would be unacceptable to deprive a pupil of the ability to undertake work through the medium of English or to undertake information technology skills. The Welsh language would be acknowledged as an essential medium;
- (4) If any nursery group discriminates against the Welsh language, a warning would be given, within a reasonable time frame, of no public funding support.

## **Human Resources**

The greatest challenge to the above will be the human resource factor. At present, newly qualified teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh are in the minority, a situation that completely undermines the education system and reinforces past weaknesses. The training systems for teachers and other school workers will require a complete transformation.

### **In terms of training new teachers:**

- (1) It will be necessary for all new teacher candidates in Wales to demonstrate a level of ability to teach through the medium of Welsh;
- (2) Students accepted on PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) courses will need to be fluent in Welsh in order to ensure a sufficient supply of bilingual teachers in schools in Wales. At present, no targets exist for the percentage of Welsh-medium students on PGCE courses. In the first instance, a quota should be set for 40% of all students accepted on PGCE courses to be fluent Welsh speakers at the outset, with the quota increasing by 10% per year until 100% has been attained by 2020;
- (3) In order to fulfill the requirement for bilingual teachers and to enable students who aspire to be teachers but do not have the necessary Welsh language skills to do so (as the present system has let itself down), it will be necessary to create a new one year language course. This course will be full time and fully funded by the Welsh Government, in the same way as the PGCE course, and will train students unable to speak Welsh, over the course of a year (a) to become Welsh speakers and (b) to be able to teach through the medium of Welsh.

### **In terms of training teachers and associated workers currently in the system:**

- (1) Intensive in-service training should be targeted at secondary school teachers, commencing with the fields/subjects to be introduced first through the medium of Welsh, e.g. Physical Education, Local Studies, etc. For this to be effective, it would mean releasing teachers from their teaching responsibilities, on the Sabbatical Scheme pattern, so that they initially become Welsh speakers and then able to teach through the medium of Welsh. In order to achieve this, we believe that six months' full time intensive training would be required;
- (2) Primary school teachers will require similar intensive training. Substantial investment will need to be made in this training, for both the primary and secondary sectors, as it will necessitate releasing staff from their teaching responsibilities. However, this will lead to a complete transformation of the schools in Wales and will eventually ensure that every pupil's right to be able to learn the Welsh language is a reality;
- (3) In order to realise these ambitious plans, vision and guidance are vital. We believe that the responsibility to train teachers in Wales, within a specific time frame, should be given to Y Coleg (Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol), and that sufficient resources should be transferred to Y Coleg in order to achieve this.

June 2013,

Education Group, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg