

Cymdeithas yr Iaith
30 October 2024

Briefing Document: Welsh Language and Education Bill

We welcome the intention to legislate in this area, and we are pleased to see cross-party consensus behind the objectives of the Bill in the scrutiny process so far. All political parties now accept that the Welsh language belongs to everyone in Wales, that the language should be a fundamental right for every child in Wales, and that bold legislation is needed to make this a reality.

However, we do not believe that the Bill in its current form will be transformative in achieving these objectives. We have outlined five core points where amendments are needed in the draft Bill in order to ensure its success and give every single child the right to be able to speak Welsh confidently:

1. Establishing a statutory target on the face of the Bill for the percentage of children receiving Welsh-medium education by 2050. We recommend setting this at 100%.
2. Placing every school on a continuum towards being a Welsh-medium school over time.
3. Ensuring by 2030 that 30% is the minimum amount of Welsh-medium education that children receive in 'Main Language - English; Partly Welsh' schools.
4. Removing the exemptions on compliance with school language categories.
5. Drawing up a national action plan to upskill the school workforce with an initial budget of £20m per year.

Universal Welsh-medium Education

- In a recent Yougov survey, 59% of the people surveyed agreed that schools in Wales should aim to educate all pupils to become confident Welsh speakers. Excluding those who answered 'don't know', the figure rose to 67%.
- The principle of moving all schools in Wales to teaching through the medium of Welsh is now a mainstream idea, backed by the support of 39% of the people of Wales, or 45% excluding those who answered 'don't know.' The support for these two principles was significantly higher among young people.
- Welsh-medium education, where each subject is taught through the medium of Welsh, is the only effective way of introducing Welsh to a child, so this should be the objective for every single school.
- In 2013, it was stated in the *One Language for All* report that learners of Welsh as a second language were not "confident enough to use Welsh outside the classroom." The hopes of section 11(3)(b)(ii) of the Bill to give children the Welsh language through primarily English-medium schools and continuing to teach Welsh as a second language are therefore completely unfounded and misleading.¹
- Section 8(2)(a) of the Bill as it is tries to redefine the meaning of Welsh language education, suggesting that it includes "teaching the Welsh language" as well as teaching (other subjects)

¹ Welsh Government, *One Language for All: Review of Welsh second language at Key Stages 3 and 4* (Cardiff: Welsh Government, 2013)

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-07/review-of-welsh-second-language-at-key-stages-3-and-4.pdf>, p. 1.

through the medium of Welsh. This is a step that muddies the waters unnecessarily, and there is a danger that this confusion will undermine the objectives of the Bill.

Statutory Targets

- Over the last twenty years, the percentage of children attending Welsh-medium education has only marginally increased, from 19.06% to 22.47% in primary schools and from 12.89% to 13.48% in secondary schools.²
- The Welsh Government missed its own target, set in the *Welsh Language in Education Strategy 2010*, that 30% of 7-year-old children would be assessed through Welsh first language by 2020, as the figure was only 22.8% by 2021.³
- This is the inevitable result of a system without statutory targets to drive the strategy. The Bill as it stands does not correct this fundamental failure; instead, it intends to give Welsh Ministers statutory responsibility to set targets (section 1 (c)), which is something completely different.
- A new section 1(b) should therefore be included which would set a statutory goal, alongside the target of one million Welsh speakers, for the percentage of children who will attend Welsh-medium education by 2050, modelled on the target of the Climate Change Act (2008) for carbon emissions.⁴ We recommend setting this target at 100%.

Placing schools on a language continuum

- The result of school categorisation is that schools are placed in static positions in terms of Welsh language use. The Bill as it stands does not ensure that schools will move up the categories, let alone make progress within the categories, which raises fundamental questions about the efficacy of the Bill.
- Rather than categories, we propose establishing a continuum on the face of the Bill, with all schools placed upon it and on a journey to become Welsh-medium schools. Clear steps for progress along the continuum should be defined on the face of the Bill, replacing the current categories in section 9.
- The trajectory for all local authorities to reach a position in 2050 in which 100% of their children receive Welsh-medium education is outlined in our document *Welsh Language Education for All: Reaching the Objective*.⁵

Welsh in 'Main Language - English; Partly Welsh' schools

- Currently, the Bill sets 10% as the minimum proportion of Welsh-medium education in 'Main Language - English; Partially Welsh' schools, which corresponds to only half a day a week, a completely insufficient proportion for creating confident Welsh speakers.
- The teaching of Welsh as a subject has been compulsory since the Education Reform Act 1988 and subsequent legislation (now Curriculum Act 2021) and little has changed since then.⁶

² Statistics Wales, *Number of pupils in primary, middle and secondary school classes by local authority and Welsh category* (Cardiff: Statistics Wales, 2024)

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Welsh-Language/pupilswelshclasses-by-localauthority-welshcategory>

³ Welsh Government, *Welsh-medium Education Strategy* (Cardiff: Welsh Government, 2010) <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/4248/1/100420welshmediumstrategyen.pdf>, p. 21; Audit Wales, *A Picture of Schools: Report of the Auditor General for Wales* (Cardiff: Audit Wales, 2021) <https://archwilio.cymru/sites/default/files/publications/POPS-Schools-Eng.pdf>, p. 8.

⁴ Government of the United Kingdom, *Climate Change Act (2008)* <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/cy/ukpga/2008/27/part/1/crossheading/the-target-for-2050>

⁵ Cymdeithas yr Iaith, *Welsh Education for All: Reaching the Objective* (Aberystwyth: Cymdeithas yr Iaith, 2024) <https://cymdeithas.cymru/dogfen/welsh-education-reaching-objective>

⁶ Welsh Assembly Government, *Iaith Pawb: A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government, 2003)

- We believe that establishing that a minimum of 30% of every child's education is delivered through the medium of Welsh, equating to a day and a half per week, would constitute a far more meaningful improvement on children's chances to become Welsh speakers. We believe that compliance with this should be achieved by 2030.

Removing Exemptions

- There are currently exemptions within the Bill regarding compliance with the minimum amount of Welsh-medium education for school categories, leading to the possibility that a school could be exempted from the requirement for a total of six years, equivalent to almost a quarter (24%) of the period up to 2050. There is no justification for this delay, and sections 18 and 19 of the Bill which provide for it should be repealed.

Workforce challenges and financial challenges

- Careful preparation and significant funding is essential in order to upskill the Welsh language ability of the workforce.
- 31.4% of teachers already have the ability to teach through the medium of Welsh, and a further 7.7% have very strong Welsh language skills.⁷
- We estimate that an investment of £20 million per year would be required as an initial step to make our proposals a reality, alongside statutory targets for training our workforce and financial incentives for teachers.⁸
- Targets should be set for learning Welsh as part of initial teacher training, alongside in-service training, such as the immensely successful 'reciclatge' courses in Catalonia.⁹

Further information:

[Cymdeithas yr Iaith's Written Evidence on the Welsh Language and Education Bill to the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee \(2024\)](#)

[Cymdeithas yr Iaith's Welsh Language Education Act \(2023\)](#)

[Welsh Education for All: Reaching the Objective \(2024\)](#)

For any further information, or to discuss the issues set out in this response, please contact cyfathrebu@cymdeithas.cymru

Education Group
Cymdeithas yr Iaith
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[https://busnes.senedd.cymru/Data/WelshCommittee582/20021219/AgendaELL%2019-02\(p.1\)%20Atodiad%20B%20A%20droddiad%20y%20Gweinidog.pdf](https://busnes.senedd.cymru/Data/WelshCommittee582/20021219/AgendaELL%2019-02(p.1)%20Atodiad%20B%20A%20droddiad%20y%20Gweinidog.pdf), p. 39.

⁷ Statistics Wales, *Teachers Welsh language ability by local authority* (Cardiff: Statistics Wales, 2024)
<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/teachers-and-support-staff/school-workforce-annual-census/welsh-language/welshability-by-localauthority>; National Centre for Learning Welsh, *Work Welsh: Employers' Information* (Carmarthen: National Centre for Learning Welsh, 2017)
https://dysgucymraeg.cymru/media/1658/pecyngwybodaeth_s_arlein_fesul-tudalen.pdf, pp. 12-15.

⁸ Cymdeithas yr Iaith, *Strategaeth datblygu gallu'r gweithlu addysg* (Aberystwyth: Cymdeithas yr Iaith, 2017),
https://cymdeithas.cymru/datblygu_gweithlu?page=7

⁹ Joanna McPake, Wilson McLeod, Fiona O'Hanlon, Giovanna Fassetta a Mona Wilson, 'Professional development programmes for teachers moving from majority to minoritized language medium education: lessons from a comparative study', *Lang Policy*, 16.1, (2016), tt. 85-86.