

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee entitled 'Achieving the Ambition: Inquiry into the Welsh Government's new Welsh Language Strategy'

5 July 2017

I am grateful to the Culture, Welsh Language, and Communications Committee for their inquiry. The evidence that the Committee has collected and the discussions during the Committee sessions has been useful as we finalise the strategy, which will be published shortly.

It is clear that achieving the goal of having a million Welsh speakers by 2050 requires step changes, with the final strategy clearly outlining the actions we deem necessary in order to achieve this goal. Committee Members will see many of their recommendations addressed in final strategy.

The Welsh Language Division revenue budget for 2017-18 is £36.195m. This is the budget which funds activities and programmes in support of this Cymraeg 2050 Strategy. This includes an additional £5 million allocation towards the Welsh language during the current financial year to enhance Welsh language training in the workplace and increase activities to promote and facilitate use of the Welsh Language – two key strands of the Strategy. An additional £4,105,000 has been committed from BEL 5511 during the 2017-2018 financial year to increase the number of educational practitioners able to teach confidently through the medium of Welsh.

During implementation of the Strategy the re-allocation of funds and resources within the current Welsh language budget will be required in specific areas to meet the key priorities. Separate advice will be provided at the appropriate time. **As a 33 year strategy, it will be necessary for future administrations to take decisions on funding priorities throughout the lifetime of the Strategy, subject to future budget rounds.**

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

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Government should publish its underlying assumptions about the increase in Welsh speakers it expects from its proposed interventions and consults further on detailed, outcome-focussed, targets and milestones before adopting them for the new strategy

Response: Accept

The underlying assumptions about the increase in Welsh speakers will be included in the forthcoming Strategy – Cymraeg 2050. This will show the anticipated trajectory towards a million speakers which will include milestones along the journey. We will continuously monitor, evaluate and consult on the implementation of the strategy, using these milestones to track progress.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the final strategy should give due weight to the importance of nurturing language use in communities, in social life and in workplaces. This should be done alongside language acquisition through Welsh-medium education, early years education and improving the quality of Welsh language teaching in English-medium schools and Welsh language outcomes for pupils.

Response: Accept

The close relationship between language acquisition and language use will be outlined in the forthcoming Strategy.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the proposed new Agency for the Promotion of Welsh has a clear focus from the outset in helping deliver the overall strategic aim of a million Welsh speakers particularly through helping parents understand the benefits of a bilingual education and of learning Welsh in schools outside the Welsh-medium sector.

Response: Accept in part

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 is currently under review. We will consult with the public on the organisational structures required for delivering Cymraeg 2050, including promotion of the Welsh language.

Financial Implications – An additional budget of £2million has been allocated towards promoting the Welsh language during 2017-2018 while the legislative process is being concluded.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out as an urgent priority:

- its assessment of how many additional teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh will be needed to achieve the strategy's overall aim;

- When those teachers will be needed; and
- How it will identify, recruit and train those teachers for when they are needed.

Response: Accept

The final Welsh Language Strategy will include targets about the number of additional teachers needed to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh at various points in time between now and 2050.

Workforce planning requires different strategies to ensure sufficient supply of high quality practitioners. Welsh Government will work with key stakeholders to develop a workforce plan for increasing the number of practitioners who can teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers what additional help and support it needs to provide to private sector employers and businesses to enable them to develop and expand their Welsh language provision as part of meeting the overall aim of the strategy.

Response: Accept

Further details on how the Welsh Government will seek to support employers in the private sector to expand their Welsh language provision will be published in the Strategy and Work Programme.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Welsh Government publishes as a matter of urgency its assessment of the additional resources that will be needed to support the strategic aim of 1 million Welsh speakers by the year 2050. This should include the projected profile of spending over the early part of the strategy and an assessment of the comparative cost of what the various interventions that will be required are likely to be.

Response: Accept in part

An additional £10m has been committed this year to start to deliver the new Strategy, including additional funding for improving Welsh in the workplace, promoting Welsh, and supporting the education sector which was announced on 4 July 2017. Maximising available funding across Welsh Government budgets will also be key.

Financial Implications – None

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Welsh Government responds specifically to Mudiad Meithrin's assessment that an additional 650 new 'cylch meithrin' will be needed to support the strategy.

Response: Reject

We accept the recommendation's aim to support additional nursery provision but do not recognise the additional 650 groups. The targets for additional nursery provision will be published in the new strategy.

Financial Implications – None.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that expanding Welsh-medium early years provision should be a priority area when considering additional funding under the strategy.

Response: Accept

Further details about the role of early years provision will be provided in the final Welsh Language Strategy.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Welsh Government should consider providing free tuition in Welsh to parents who put their children into Welsh-language pre-school provision.

Response: Accept

Consideration will be given to this option as part of the review of Welsh language tuition for families currently underway by the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Welsh Government takes steps to improve the information it has available on the Welsh-medium capabilities of early years practitioners so that it can plan properly to ensure that practitioners have the right skill mix and progression opportunities to support the aims of the strategy.

Response: Accept

Gaining a better understanding of the early years workforce's ability to work through the medium of Welsh is a vital part of developing provision, and further details regarding this will be provided in the strategy documents.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 11

We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out in detail how it intends to move “schools along the language continuum” including examples of good practice models, with a particular focus on how it will address any concerns from parents and the wider community.

Response: Accept in principle

Whilst it is a local authority function to plan for school places and to set out their plans for developing Welsh medium education in their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs), the Welsh Government intends to review the regulations and guidance in respect of WESPs in order to encourage movement along the language continuum.

When proposing significant change, local authorities and other proposers must comply with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code including in respect of consultation. The School Organisation Code is currently subject to consultation.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 12

We recommend that the final strategy should emphasise the need to move greater number of pupils along the language continuum and how this will be achieved in both in all categories of schools in Wales.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government has already committed to introduce one continuum of learning Welsh for all pupils in Wales as part of the new curriculum. Further details on its implementation will be available as the curriculum is developed.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 13

We recommend that the Welsh Government evaluates the efficacy of its current scheme for improving the level of Welsh of practising teachers and sets out a projected timescale for how Welsh speaking teachers, who do not currently teach in Welsh, can be encouraged to do so including providing more opportunities:

- for them to transfer to Welsh medium education; and
- for mentoring and others schemes to help build confidence in their ability in Welsh.

Response: Accept in principle.

Welsh Government has undertaken three evaluations of the Sabbatical Scheme since its inception in 2006. Evaluations have concluded that the Scheme is having an impact on the Welsh language skills of practitioners and their ability to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. Further evaluations will be planned at timely intervals.

Workforce planning requires different strategies to ensure sufficient supply of high quality practitioners. Welsh Government will work with key stakeholders to develop a workforce plan for increasing the number of practitioners who can teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 14

We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out clearly:

- how many additional teachers able to teach Welsh as a subject and teach through the medium of Welsh will be needed to achieve the strategy's overall aim;

- when they will be needed; and
- how many of these additional teachers will be drawn from the existing teaching workforce and how many through initial teacher training or other routes into the profession.

Response: Accept

As noted under recommendation 4, the final Welsh Language Strategy will include targets about the number of additional teachers needed to teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh at various points in time between now and 2050.

Workforce planning requires different strategies to ensure sufficient supply of high quality practitioners. Welsh Government will work with key stakeholders to develop a workforce plan for increasing the number of practitioners who can teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 15

We recommend that that the Welsh Government considers how it can increase the supply of Welsh speaking students entering initial teacher training or other entry routes into the profession taking into account any wider recruitment implications this may for recruiting teachers both within Wales and in competition with other parts of the UK.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government will work with key stakeholders to target new entrants into initial teacher education.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers the role of learning support staff in supporting the aims of the strategy and takes steps, along with Estyn and the Education Workforce Council, to establish a clearer picture of their current language skills to help inform future planning.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government acknowledges the role of learning support staff in supporting the aims of the strategy. We currently provide specific Sabbatical Scheme courses for learning support staff to learn Welsh or improve their Welsh. Learning support staff will be included in our wider workforce plan for education practitioners.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 17

We recommend that the new strategy should place equal emphasis on dramatically improving outcomes from Welsh second language teaching along with increasing the numbers receiving Welsh-medium or bilingual education.

Response: Accept

Further details are included in the final strategy.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 18

We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out clearly how it will dramatically improve the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government has already committed to introduce one continuum of learning Welsh for all pupils in Wales as part of the new curriculum. Further details on its implementation will be available as the curriculum is developed.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 19

We recommend that the Welsh Government along with the WJEC reviews the provision of Welsh language learning resources for students to ensure that students receiving their education through the medium of Welsh are not disadvantaged.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government provides grant funding to the WJEC to provide resources to support Welsh-medium qualifications and will continue to provide this

funding. Following the summit on bilingual resources in April, work has begun on reviewing the current situation and finding a long-term solution to the provision of resources to support qualifications and curriculum.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 20

We recommend a thorough evaluation of the Sabbatical Scheme looking particularly at its value for money in improving classroom outcomes and in encouraging more teachers to teach Welsh or in Welsh.

Response: Accept in principle

Welsh Government has undertaken three evaluations of the Sabbatical Scheme since its inception in 2006. Evaluations have concluded that the Scheme is having an impact on the Welsh language skills of practitioners and their ability to teach in Welsh and through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. Further evaluations will be planned at timely intervals.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 21

We recommend that the proposed new Agency for the Promotion of Welsh, working with established organisations and local initiatives, promotes and markets Welsh as a community language with benefits to speakers as a skill and in the workplace.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government will be undertaking additional promotional work while the current legislation is under review. This will include promoting the language as a skill in the workplace, and closer engagement with community organisations and initiatives.

Financial Implications – An additional £2 million has been allocated to carry out these additional areas of work during the 2017-2018 financial year.

Recommendation 22

We recommend that the Welsh Government continues to support good quality, widely available Welsh for Adults provision but considers carefully its relative priority within the strategy compared to other priority areas.

Response: Accept in principle

Welsh for Adults provision, and all other areas of work, will be considered as the strategy is implemented and resources prioritised accordingly.

Financial Implications – Any additional costs will be met by re-prioritising existing programme budgets

Recommendation 23

We recommend that the final strategy includes a clear definition of what will count as a Welsh speaker in evaluating whether the strategy is successful in its aim of creating a million speakers.

Response: Accept

The final Welsh Language Strategy will address this matter.

Financial Implications None

Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language