

Supporting and Promoting the Welsh Language: An inquiry into the legislative, policy and wider context

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Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
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Introduction

1. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) supports the Welsh Government's vision of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 in accordance with 'Cymraeg 2050'. We recognise the Cymraeg 2050: Welsh Language strategy is a key goal of the Welsh Language Commissioner's work. We have responded positively to this agenda and welcome the role of higher education in supporting the attainment of this target.
2. [HEFCW's corporate strategy 2017-2020](#) advocates the Well-being of Future Generations goal of a Wales of vibrant culture and language. As an organisation we are committed to working with different stakeholders to maximise the delivery of provision in higher education through the medium of Welsh. However, we do not have a role in monitoring HE providers' adherence to the Welsh Language Standards. Accordingly, it will be for them to determine their individual responses to this consultation.

Quality Assurance

3. As part of our statutory responsibilities under the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 we work with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in Wales which is also subject to the Welsh Language Standards and has an appreciation of Welsh language requirements. Our requirements for external quality assurance take into account the Welsh language and likewise QAA are contracted by Universities Wales to deliver quality assurance services, including Welsh medium requirements. In June 2018, we launched the [Quality Assessment Framework](#) for Wales which embedded Welsh language as part of the [baseline regulatory requirements](#). These requirements take into account the Welsh Language Standards when reviewing the quality of education at regulated institutions.

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

4. Our remit letter for 2017-18 from Welsh Government acknowledged our partnership work with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (the Coleg) and, despite funding changes, set out expectations for us to continue to support achievement of the Coleg's strategic objectives. Similarly our remit letter for 2018-19 reiterated the need for a close working relationship with the Coleg. We retain an observer role on the Coleg's board of directors and the Chief Executive of the Coleg is a Member of HEFCW's Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee. We also hold regular liaison meetings and an annual Chief Executive meeting. Data is shared with the Coleg through a Memorandum of Understanding that facilitates monitoring of the use of the Welsh language in higher education.
5. We have engaged regularly with the [Coleg](#) to determine whether Welsh medium targets submitted by HE providers in the Fee and Access Plans are sufficiently

ambitious. We have encouraged the broad availability of courses through the medium of Welsh across all higher education, and regulated further education institutions in Wales. As seen below, our approach has been successful, as there has been a year on year increase up to 2015/16 in the number of 5+ and 40+ credits being undertaken through the medium of Welsh. Despite the drop in figures for 2016/17, which may impact the data in the short term, the pattern of progress does show an increase of students studying both 5+ and 40+ credits through the medium of Welsh.

6 The number of students studying higher education courses at higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales undertaking at least 5 credits of their course through the medium of Welsh, per annum, will rise from 4,335 in 2011/12 to 5,600 in 2016/17, including a rise from 2,269 to 3,030 in the number of those studying at least 40 credits per annum						
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
5+ credits	4,335	4,882	4,832	5,399	6,784	5,767
40+ credits	2,269	2,360	2,445	2,633	2,860	2,284
NB there have been manual amendments to previous years' data on this strategy measure						

Post legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 - to assess the perceived successes and limitations of the legislation, and the impact and effectiveness of Welsh Language standards in improving and increasing access to Welsh language services.

6. We have successfully implemented the set of Welsh Language Standards (the Standards) that apply to HEFCW by reviewing and amending our [implementation plan](#) and through discussions with the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner. Awareness of the Standards in HEFCW was promoted through discussion sessions with staff in preparation for their implementation. In our annual staff Welsh language survey in 2016/17 only two members of staff were not aware of the Standards six months prior to implementation.
7. We have annually prepared a report on our use of the Welsh language for the Welsh Language Board and more recently the Welsh Language Commissioner. Our annual reports noted the documentation and reports that have been published bilingually and the volume of Welsh language correspondence and telephone calls from the public. In 2017/18 we received 21 emails and fewer than 10 phone calls initiated in Welsh. We have also ensured that bilingual presentations have been available at public meetings, and attendees have been encouraged to use the language of their choice at such events.
8. We have found the set of Standards for higher education institutions, although different to HEFCW, to be useful when focusing on the bigger picture of Cymraeg 2050. As a public organisation working to facilitate the use of the Welsh language we have acknowledged the requirements on higher education institutions. We have been able to assist with providing bilingual guidance and

have made Welsh language Fee and Access plan templates available, helping with the promotion of the Welsh language in the sector. A proactive approach will enable all institutions to respond to the Fee and Access plan process in either Welsh or English, using resources made available to them, without the requirement of translation.

Successes

9. The benchmark for HEFCW's Welsh language attainment prior to the introduction of the Standards was noted in our [Welsh language scheme 2010 report](#). Reviewing the report provided an opportunity to evaluate the current Welsh language position in HEFCW and address the requirements for moving forwards towards the implementation of the Standards. Our Impact Assessment procedures for new policies was amended to reflect these requirements and to reflect our explicit commitment to the Welsh language.
10. A greater understanding of the Welsh language has been developed following the implementation of the Standards. In advance of the introduction of the standards on 1 April 2018, all staff were trained to answer the phone with a bilingual greeting. Welsh speaking staff have also been encouraged to wear 'Cymraeg' and 'Dysgwr' lanyards and badges as appropriate, to advise that they can provide a service in Welsh and to promote the speaking of Welsh with external stakeholders, as well as within HEFCW. We also ran a number of briefing sessions to allay any staff queries concerning the implementation of the Standards. We continue to provide updates with regards to the Standards and follow up sessions when requested and with new staff during inductions. As an organisation subject to the Standards we welcome correspondence in both Welsh and English.
11. The [compliance notice](#) of Section 44 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 was helpful when drafting an implementation plan to adhere to the Standards. Following the implementation of the Standards we identified where further progress to encourage and facilitate the Welsh language could be made. Our website has always been bilingual for members of the public. Our 'mysite' (intranet) system that includes policies and online forms relating to human resources is in the process of being made bilingual by 2019-20. We have also made a number of amendments to our procurement system to encourage bilingual bids. We have continued to publish all press releases bilingually despite this not being a requirement under the Standards.
12. Overall, the process of implementing the Standards has had a positive effect on the Welsh language in HEFCW. It has broadened its profile and created a more welcoming environment to engage in Welsh in the workplace. In 2017-18 previously only a fifth of the organisation answered the phone bilingually and now under the Standards this applies to all staff. Overall, it has encouraged speaking Welsh in the workplace. In our recent Welsh language survey a third of the organisation was interested in undertaking Welsh language training during

2018-19. This is an increase on the 10 members of staff previously interested in 2017-18. We have encouraged and financially supported members of staff on Welsh language courses, including residential options, and will work together with Welsh Government when reviewing future training arrangements. We have liaised with the National Centre for Learning Welsh and also taken advantage of the 'Learn Work Welsh' courses run by Welsh Government.

13. HEFCW has also published a number of reports and documents bilingually, including our annual report, responses to Welsh Government consultations and our Equality Annual Report. This has reflected our views on the importance of promoting and facilitating the progression of the Welsh language.
14. We have actively encouraged the delivery of additional HE courses through the medium of Welsh in partnership with the Coleg and supported Welsh medium provision in initial teacher education, which increases access to Welsh medium education overall. We recognise the importance of providing opportunities in higher education through the Welsh language and its ability to allow more individuals to engage with the language in different environments.

Limitations

15. We have faced a number of limitations with regard to the progress concerning the Welsh language. As a small organisation, providing expertise through the medium of Welsh can be challenging. Not all policy areas include fluent Welsh speakers, which means that as an organisation we cannot always provide detailed policy advice to external stakeholders in Welsh. However, we follow distinct procedures in accordance with the relevant service delivery standards to maximize opportunities to use the Welsh language when engaging with the public.
16. We faced some issues in interpreting the Standards and the more rigid approach taken by the Welsh language Commissioner's office. As there are often questions around the interpretation of the Standards, we would welcome the availability of practical support and guidance from the Commission. We found some Standards to be disproportionately burdensome for a relatively small organisation such as HEFCW, and we covered these issues in our initial response to the original consultation.
17. Staff have noted that the Standards focus on compliance rather than enhancement of the language. If the work of the Commissioner's office included language enhancement in the workplace and made resources available or encouraged dialogue between organisations, further opportunities to improve use of the Welsh language could be identified. We also rely on the Welsh Government to address certain issues under their own obligations, given our position as a tenant in their building.

To assess whether the legislative framework supports or limits Welsh language promotion and its use.

18. We appreciate that the Welsh Government and Welsh Language Commissioner require robust arrangements to ensure that public bodies respond to their responsibilities in relation to supporting and promoting the Welsh language. We accept that, at present, the Welsh Language Commissioner should monitor how public bodies fulfil their Welsh language duties, which would include the Standards. However, we consider that there is a balance to be achieved between regulation, support and guidance. We would advocate a supportive rather than punitive approach towards non-compliance. Consequently, we would encourage an open approach whereby the Welsh Language Commissioner's office would work with public sector organisations, including Welsh Government, to ensure an effective use of the Welsh language. This could include reconvening a number of Welsh language support networks for sector groups. Our approach in response to the Standards is to build good practice and encourage bilingualism within higher education and regulated further education institutions to progress towards the Welsh Government's goal.
19. Promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language should also focus on the wider Welsh society, beyond public service organisations. Higher education institutions have assisted us with our work to facilitate a thriving Welsh language through a number of projects, as is demonstrated in our [Higher Education for Future Generations document](#). For example, Aberystwyth University has a partnership with Urdd Gobaith Cymru which has provided opportunities to promote the use of the Welsh language in sport. Cardiff Metropolitan University has provided Welsh language classes for staff, while Bangor University has encouraged guest speakers to conduct activities bilingually at the institution.
20. Our [Innovation Nation: on Common Ground](#) publication recognised the breadth of work being undertaken by higher education institutions which included promoting the Welsh language in the local community. For example, the Open University provides OpenLearn Cymru as a free online learning bilingual resource for learners to increase skills and encourage pathways to higher education. Bangor University has aimed to promote the Welsh language through its Language Technologies Unit with the health, education, social policy and digital technology sectors. In these publications we have recognised the importance of the above projects along with our continued support in bringing the local communities together to promote the Welsh Government's ambition of Cymraeg 2050. In future, we suggest that greater priority should be given to these types of activities encouraging and facilitating the Welsh language in the wider context, as opposed to the further development of regulation.
21. As a result of the Standards we believe the profile of Welsh medium provision in higher education has increased. Awareness of further opportunities in education and the workplace following a bilingual education have been recognised and widely promoted. This action has the ability to directly strengthen the use of

Welsh language within the workforce in future and in working towards Cymraeg 2050.

22. Overall as an organisation we have successfully amended our practice to reflect our requirements subject to the Standards. We already adhered to a number of the requirements prior to its implementation, such as an annual assessment of our staff's Welsh language skills, and we will continue to go beyond what is expected of us as an organisation where we are able, for example by publishing bilingual press releases. Organisations which support this agenda will continue to promote it, and a standards compliance approach may not help in that context. We consider that we have welcomed these changes and continue to work towards enhancing our practice in furthering Welsh Government's initiative Cymraeg 2050.