

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	13 June 2023
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Beca Brown
Liaison Officer:	Debbie A W Jones
Contact Telephone Number:	32489
Item Title:	Responding to a Welsh Government Consultation – Proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1 The Cabinet is asked to approve the Council's response to the White Paper consultation – Proposals for A Welsh Language Bill, Welsh Government.

2. THE REASON WHY A DECISION IS REQUIRED

- 2.1 The Welsh Government is consulting on a White Paper for the proposed Welsh Language Education Bill. The Council's response to the consultation needs to be decided.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Welsh Government has committed in its Governance Programme, and in the Collaboration Agreement between the Government and Plaid Cymru, to present a Welsh Language Education Bill during the current term of this Parliament. According to the Welsh Government, the proposals in the White Paper for the Welsh Language Education Bill are presented in the context of the significant challenge that the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy alongside the target of a million Welsh speakers sets. The Welsh Government believes that this calls for transformative changes to the way we think about the Welsh language and the role of education within that. Here is a link to the consultation document: [Proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill | GOV.WALES](#)
- 3.2 The proposals in this White Paper are intended to gather views on proposals for the Bill. In some areas, proposals are presented which could be realised without the need to legislate. They are included in the Paper as they are core to the legislative proposals

according to the Welsh Government. The Paper is divided into chapters, and with some exceptions, the main proposals in the Paper relate to the statutory education system (ages 3 to 16), however it is important to note that the Welsh Government's vision in terms of learning and acquiring the Welsh language is lifelong:

- Chapter 1: Make the target of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050 a statutory target and make provision regarding linguistic outcomes for learners throughout the education system.
- Chapter 2: Continuum of lifelong Welsh language skills.
- Chapter 3: Establish a statutory system to categorise schools according to language medium and create a mechanism to move schools to a higher category.
- Chapter 4: Statutory National Plan for the acquisition and learning of the Welsh language.
- Chapter 5: Planning the Welsh language in education within local authorities.
- Chapter 6: Duties on local authorities to proactively promote Welsh-medium education.
- Chapter 7: Support to realise the Bill's objectives

3.3 Naturally, the aspirations and outcomes set out in the proposals reflect the high-level national picture in all its diversity and relating this national picture and aspirations to the local situation of each authority will be a requirement. Indeed, there is considerable diversity in terms of Welsh-medium education provision across Wales, diversity in the demographic situation of the Welsh language in the community across Wales, together with a variety of challenges from the point of view of the education workforce. As a result, the Welsh Government emphasises that each authority will be on its own unique journey towards maintaining and developing Welsh-medium education.

3.4 Appendix 1 includes Gwynedd Council's response to the consultation Proposals for a Welsh Language Education Bill which indicates the general support for the Welsh Government's national direction in terms of legislation in the field of Welsh language education.

3.5 In the response, it is acknowledged that this national direction, however admirable it is, cannot reflect the situation of the Welsh language locally and local aspirations for maintaining and increasing Welsh language education. Therefore, although supportive of the objectives of the proposals in the Paper, in the response it is recognised that Cyngor Gwynedd has an ambition for every pupil that goes beyond the Welsh Government's vision, and that through the County's Welsh Education Language Policy which has proven very successful over the decades to ensure that every child and young person in Gwynedd has the opportunity to acquire the Welsh language through the education system and become proficient bilingual by the age of 11. In fact, in Gwynedd the Welsh language belongs to everyone, and through the County's Welsh Language Education Policy every child is given the opportunity to develop Welsh language skills. Gwynedd's Welsh Language Education Policy is therefore an example to the rest of Wales, and one the Welsh Government should consider promoting nationally to reach the goal of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

- 3.6 It is also recognised in the response to the consultation the need for more resources for local authorities directly to be able to act more effectively and timely to ensure that the vision of maintaining and growing Welsh language education in line with the expectations set across Wales will be realised in order to achieve the goal of one million speakers by 2050.
- 3.7 The Welsh Government intends to present an ambitious programme of change that requires action at many levels, recognising that legislation has an important contribution to play in laying the foundations for realising the change. However, the Welsh Government also recognises that legislation is only one part of the picture, and other activities and interventions such as policies across the educational field, funding, engagement and behavioural change will also have a key contribution to play.
- 3.8 At the same time, the Welsh Government recognises the challenges that exists in terms of:
- the need to develop an education workforce with the necessary language skills to enable the expansion of Welsh-medium education and improve the linguistic outcomes of learners in all schools.
 - children population projections that are likely to be static over the next decades.
 - local factors including diverse linguistic nature, population density, geography, and different starting points in terms of availability and rates of growth in Welsh-medium education.
 - the Welsh language skills of learners that are not in Welsh-medium education.
- 3.9 To succeed, the Welsh Government is proposing steps that respond to the above challenges in a one-system approach, which recognises that today's pupils will be Welsh speakers, teachers, and the Welsh workforce of tomorrow. The Welsh Government wants the education system to embrace the Welsh language as a language that belongs to all pupils in Wales. Therefore, steps are proposed in the Paper that will reduce the gap in terms of linguistic outcomes:
- It is proposed that a clear and definite focus is required on pupils' linguistic outcomes and that this should be the main principle of the proposals for the Bill. Doing so will give a clear message to the entire education system, and schools in each linguistic category of the need to improve the linguistic outcomes of all pupils.
 - It is proposed that the linguistic outcome which is at the heart of the Welsh Government's ambition for the education system by 2050 is that all pupils leave statutory education able to confidently speak the Welsh language. It is proposed that the aim for that will be, as a minimum, a level equivalent to level B2 Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). (The CEFR is a continuum of international language skills. Proposals are presented in this paper regarding creating a skills continuum for the Welsh language that emulates the CEFR.)
 - It is proposed that this linguistic outcome will be a minimum for 2050, and a

goal for all learners whatever the linguistic category of their schools.

- The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 already requires all pupils to learn the Welsh language. The key to learning a language is the contact hours the learner receives in learning and using it, together with the standard of learning or teaching and clear leadership.
- Welsh-medium Education is, and will continue to be, the best opportunity and the fastest route to becoming Welsh speakers. As a result, the Welsh Government has included proposals in this Paper to strengthen the system for planning growth in the number of Welsh-medium schools, and therefore the number of pupils who attend them.
- However, to allow every pupil, in every school, to become a Welsh speaker and to close the gap between linguistic outcomes that depend on the education medium, the Paper proposes to increase over time the requirements in terms of a proportion of each week which will be assigned to Welsh language provision according to linguistic category.
- Welsh Government believes that setting reasonable yet challenging expectations that increase over time is a sustainable means of achieving the goal, giving an opportunity for planning to take place on several key aspects simultaneously. Absolutely core to that will be the planning to increase the Welsh-speaking workforce in the education sector.

4. NEXT STEPS AND SCHEDULE

- 4.1 Subject to the Cabinet's approval of the consultation response in Appendix 1, it is intended to send the response to the Welsh Government by 16 June 2023, which is the closing date of the consultation.

5. ANY CONSULTATIONS HELD PRIOR TO THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE DECISION

Statutory officers' opinion:

Monitoring Officer:

A White Paper provides an opportunity to influence on proposed legislation in its early stages. Considering the importance of the subject under consideration it is appropriate that the Cabinet agrees the position of the Council on the consultation.

Head of Finance:

I have no comments to add to the report from the perspective of financial propriety.