

Engagement Meetings to discuss Cyngor Gwynedd's Education Language Policy

Over the coming months, Cyngor Gwynedd representatives will hold a series of engagement sessions to discuss Cyngor Gwynedd's current Education Language Policy. These sessions will be an opportunity to discuss and gather ideas and suggestions about the policy and to consider whether it needs to be revised in light of the results of the 2021 Census and a number of policy developments in language and education at a national level.

1. Background

Cyngor Gwynedd has a long history of innovation in Welsh and bilingual education and this innovation has ensured that Gwynedd's young people within local authority schools have received wide-ranging opportunities to become fluently bilingual. Gwynedd now has the largest number of Welsh-speakers of any local authority in Wales and here too the highest percentage of young people are educated in Welsh and bilingually. But at the same time, the linguistic changes taking place in the county, as well as changes in the Welsh Government's influence on education in Wales, make it timely for us to consider reviewing Cyngor Gwynedd's education language policy and have a discussion about which elements of the current policy are working well and where any reforms or changes need to be made.

In order to hold this discussion on Gwynedd's language education policy, the Council intends to hold a series of meetings across the authority with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss how the current policy could be improved and strengthened in the context of the 2021 census results and the current linguistic and educational expectations of Welsh Government.

2021 Census

According to the 2021 Census, **73,560 people** (aged 3 and over) were able to speak Welsh in Gwynedd, which equates to **64.4%** of the population. In 2011, the number of speakers in Gwynedd was **77,000** and the corresponding percentage was **65.4%**. Therefore, the proportion of people who speak Welsh in Gwynedd between 2011 and 2021 has reduced by 1%.

2. The linguistic profile of Gwynedd.

2021 census statistics show that **86.2%** of Gwynedd's 3-15 year olds can speak Welsh. Among the general population the percentage is significantly lower than that. At an all-Wales level, Gwynedd has the highest percentage of 3-15 year-olds who speak Welsh.

Looking at a wider platform, Gwynedd is more successful at maintaining its linguistic position (in terms of the Welsh language) than any other region in the world apart from Catalonia (10 million speakers). Therefore, Cyngor Gwynedd can take pride in its education language policy over the last few decades as the policy has played a key role in this linguistic success.

The development stages of Cyngor Gwynedd's current language strategy in education

Targets

- Ensure all pupils become fluently bilingual
- Plan to increase regular use of Welsh.
- Encouraging many more pupils to study through the medium of Welsh up to external exam level (16yrs)
- 100% of Gwynedd children have the opportunity to speak Welsh and use the language regularly.

3. Welsh Government Welsh Language and Education promotion policies

In reviewing Gwynedd's Education Language Policy, we must now look at a wider context than the role and work of Cyngor Gwynedd itself. The developments taking place in Welsh and bilingual education must now be considered at an all-Wales level as a number of statutory and innovative steps are taking place at a national level.

As part of the Education Legislation 2013, local authorities have been required to agree **Welsh in Education Strategic Plans** (WESP) with the Welsh Government. Cyngor Gwynedd's latest WESP was agreed in 2022 and is effective for the period 2023-2033. This document sets out the main current principles associated with Cyngor Gwynedd's education language policies.

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/cy/Cyngor/Dogfennau-Cyngor/Strategaethau-a-pholisiau/Cynllun-Strategol-Y-Gymraeg-mewn-Addysg.pdf>

In 2016 the Welsh Government published its latest strategy for the Welsh language, a language strategy that will cover the next three decades to the year 2050: **Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh-speakers**

<https://www.llyw.cymru/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/cymraeg-2050-strategaeth-y-gymraeg-v1-1.pdf>

The aims of Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh-speakers

	Aim	Target
1.	Increase the number of Welsh-speakers	1 million Welsh-speakers by 2050
2.	Increase the use of the Welsh language	Daily use of Welsh increasing from 10% to 20%

This strategic document emphasises the importance of increasing the numbers who can speak Welsh. It is also stressed that increasing daily use of Welsh is equally important. These aims align with the strategic aims Cyngor Gwynedd has been promoting for a number of decades.

Curriculum for Wales (2021)

Within the **Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021** which outlines the Curriculum for Wales it is noted that Welsh is also a mandatory requirement. The legislation that outlines the regulations relating to the new Curriculum for Wales states that there are (in addition to the four purposes of the curriculum) mandatory elements spanning the 3 to 16 year old learning continuum, which include the following:

- **Welsh**
- **English – from age 7.** *Headteachers and funded but non-maintained nursery education providers can exercise their discretion in deciding whether, and to what extent, they will deliver English to learners aged between 3 and 7. This is to facilitate the immersion process of early years learners in Welsh.*

Cyngor Gwynedd's education strategies are also expected to take into account the following Welsh Government documents:

- ***Our nation's mission: high standards and aspirations for all Welsh Government (2023)***
- ***School improvement guide: a framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability (Statutory in 2024)***

In all these documents, the local authorities and schools in Wales have a duty to plan appropriately for increasing the number of young people who can speak Welsh and who do so on a daily basis.

4. Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill

Another development is the Welsh Government's intention to put on the Statute Book legislation relating to the further development of aspects of Welsh Language Education. It is stated in the White Paper, published by the Government, that:

The Bill will take steps to enable all pupils in Wales to become confident Welsh-speakers through the statutory education system.

Key proposals include:

- ***Reflecting the target of one million Welsh-speakers in law***
- ***Establishing a statutory system of categorising maintained schools according to language***
- ***Over time, increasing Welsh language provision in maintained schools that are not already dedicated Welsh-medium schools***
- ***Reforming how local authorities plan Welsh language provision in schools to meet targets set by Welsh Ministers***
- ***Requirements on local authorities to pro-actively promote Welsh-medium education, including late immersion provision;***

It can therefore be seen that the Welsh Government expects to see an increase in the provision of education through the medium of Welsh over these next few years and that there is a statutory obligation for the local authorities to plan for this growth.

One of the intentions of the Bill is to turn the process of categorisation of schools into a statutory one and will be based on the provision and numbers of pupils who will receive Welsh-medium education in a school, up to the age of 16. Therefore, in the future all primary and secondary schools will fall into one of three categories. (The numbers 1, 2 and 3 are used to denote the categories.) In the primary, Category 1 will refer to schools that teach primarily through the medium of English, Category 2 to dual-language schools and Category 3 to schools that teach primarily through the medium of Welsh. In the secondary sector, there will also be 3 categories but the definition will be slightly different. There will be an emphasis on increasing the number of areas of learning available to be studied through the medium of Welsh and increasing the number of pupils taking courses up to the age of 16 through the medium of Welsh.

The Bill will also legislate on the following:

- A code to describe ability in Welsh that will be based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
- The requirement for all school governing bodies to produce a delivery plan in relation to the Welsh language every three years which, among other matters, will require a school to identify how much Welsh language education is provided by the school in the context of the school's linguistic and educational category. All schools will be required to submit the plan to the local authority for approval.
- The requirement for Welsh Ministers to produce a National framework on Welsh Education and Learning Welsh.
- Amending parts of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013

- Establishment of a National Institute for Learning Welsh

Timetable of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill

- Royal assent June 2025
- Consultation on the Code for Wales 2025
- National Institute for Learning Welsh established in 2026
- Further consultation on categorisation and delivery plan 2027
- Consultation on the national framework 2027
- Temporary exceptions to the new categorisation system terminating in 2036

5. Gwynedd Education Language Profile.

2021 census statistics show that **86.2%** of Gwynedd's 3-15 year olds can speak Welsh. This is a significant percentage higher than the percentage of Welsh-speakers among the general population, which is 64.4%. These numbers show that Gwynedd schools' Education Language Policy has had a very positive impact by increasing the number of young people who can speak Welsh within the county. Improving language skills is one way to measure policy success of promoting bilingualism. But for stable bilingualism to be successful, young people must have the confidence to speak both languages, using Welsh and English with complete fluency in both formal and informal situations.

What is clear is that planning must be intentional and cautious to maintain the bilingual proficiency of our young people. One of the most effective methods of doing this, as Cyngor Gwynedd's current policy clearly demonstrates is to give them opportunities to receive their education and extra-curricular experiences through the medium of Welsh. But is there room to expand that provision? The context set out above offers us a good opportunity to consider and discuss this.

The Immersion Education System

In order for the Welsh language policy to be inclusive, a specialist service is provided within the county, namely the Immersion Education System. The immersion system for newcomers is a strength here in Gwynedd. Since its establishment in January 2023 there are six strategic locations across the county providing a service for latecomers to acquire the Welsh language. Taking an intensive immersion course for a period of ten weeks equips learners with the skills necessary to enable them to blend in and thrive back in mainstream schools in a formal and informal context within Gwynedd's Welsh

and bilingual education system.

Nursery Education

All the nursery education settings within the Council's control are settings that teach children through the medium of Welsh. A firm foundation is set for the Welsh language here and it is ensured that every child is given a Welsh language, Literacy and Communication skills assessment on admission to and at the end of part-time nursery education and at the end of the Foundation Phase.

Additional Learning Needs:

All pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) in Gwynedd have access to Welsh-medium provision and services. This service is for all ranges and types of Additional Learning Needs. Pupils and their parents have access to a fully bilingual service.

Gwynedd schools language policy

Primary

The aim of the Language Policy is the same across all the county's primary schools, which is to develop the ability of all pupils to be confident in both languages by the end of year 6. Welsh is the official assessment language in the school at the end of the Foundation Phase. In years 3-6, the aim is to continue to develop the pupils' grasp of Welsh, giving attention to the development of their skills in both languages.

Secondary

Appropriate progression and continuation is expected in the language medium of teaching each pupil when transferring from primary school. Every pupil who has studied Welsh (First Language) as a subject in primary school is expected to continue to do so in secondary school, and to sit an assessment/examination in the subject at the end of Year 11. Every pupil who has been taught through the medium of Welsh in primary school is expected to continue to do so in secondary school, and to sit external assessments/examinations through the medium of Welsh.

Secondary schools build upon the foundations set in the primary by ensuring that each pupil continues to develop skills in Welsh and in English.

Additional Learning Needs

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan ensures that children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) receive equal linguistic opportunities from a bilingual education perspective.

