

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	10 April 2025
TITLE	Education Language Policy
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	Following the submission of the findings of the Engagement process on 13-2-25 in the context of amending the Language Policy, an invitation was extended to return to the Scrutiny Committee to present a draft of the amended policy.
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1. Why does it need scrutiny?

1.1 : The linguistic changes taking place in Gwynedd, as well as changes in terms of the Welsh Government's influence on education in Wales, make it timely for us to consider reviewing Cyngor Gwynedd's Education Language Policy. Following the engagement process, the Education Department has been working with Meirion Prys Jones to produce a draft revised Language Policy that is submitted as an appendix to this report for scrutiny.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

2.1 The Draft Revised Education Language Policy

This policy is an attempt to set Gwynedd's ambition to ensure that the County's children and young people grow up to be proficient users of the Welsh language and develop bilingual or multilingual skills within our Education System.

This is the first step on our journey to reform the language policy. Creating policies is a complex process and we recognize that more work needs to be done on the legal aspects in this area, as the Welsh Language and Education Measure evolves on its journey through parliament. This is an opportunity to ask for your opinion, and your guidance as elected members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee regarding the strategic direction of this draft.

3. Summary of the Key Matters

3.1 This report summarises the proposed changes to the existing Education Language Policy, as follows:

- All pre-school education settings will provide through the medium of Welsh.
- All pupils in the Foundation Phase until the end of Year 2 will be taught **and** assessed through the medium of Welsh until the end of Year 2. Schools will provide opportunities for pupils to use the Welsh language regularly, inside and outside the classroom, in a curricular and extra-curricular manner.
- From year 3 onwards, in a context of fostering skills that are associated with full bilingualism, at least 80% of the pupils' educational activities (both curricular and extra-curricular) will be in Welsh.

- Pupils' grasp of Welsh will continue to be developed, giving attention to the development of their skills in both languages. From year 3 onwards, English will be introduced as a subject and cross-curricular learning medium.
- In the Secondary schools Welsh will be the main language of education for all pupils up to 16 years old (in accordance with the Welsh Government's definition of the statutory expectations for Category 3 Secondary schools).
- Pupils' grasp of Welsh will continue to be developed, giving attention to the development of their skills in both languages. English will continue to be introduced as a subject and learning medium of some cross-curricular elements.
- Schools are expected to ensure that all pupils (Years 2-9) who are latecomers and new Welsh speakers are referred to attend Gwynedd's Immersion Education System, for them to be able to follow the curriculum in full in accordance with Cyngor Gwynedd's Education Language Policy.
- Children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) will receive equal linguistic opportunities in accordance with this policy.
- **The main significant amendments proposed to the existing Language Policy is to remove bilingualism and bilingual teaching. The policy notes clearly that Welsh will be the principal language of the education.**

4. Background / Context

4.1: Gwynedd's Education Language Policy is part of the Council's wider strategy to ensure that children and young people up to 18 years old are given the opportunity to develop their language skills in Welsh and English, so that they are proficiently bilingual.

4.2: As part of Education Legislation (2013), local authorities were required to agree on a *Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)* with the Welsh Government – a plan that will remain in force for a ten-year period (2022-2033). The WESP sets out the main current principles associated with Cyngor Gwynedd's education language policies.

4.3: In 2016 the *Welsh 2050: a Million Welsh Speakers* (Welsh Government) strategy was published. The document emphasises the importance of increasing the numbers who speak Welsh but it is also emphasised that increasing the daily use of Welsh is as important. The strategy's aims align with the strategic aims that Cyngor Gwynedd has been promoting for several decades.

4.4: Within the *Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021* (Welsh Government; 2021) it is noted that the Welsh language is a mandatory requirement, which includes:

- Welsh
- English: from age 7.

4.5: Cyngor Gwynedd's education strategies are also expected to take into account the following documents: *Our nation's mission: high standards and aspirations for all* (Welsh Government; 2023) and *School improvement guide: a framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability* (Welsh Government; 2024). In these documents, 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.

4.6: 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 - *Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill*. It notes *"The Bill will take steps to enable all pupils in Wales to become confident Welsh speakers through the statutory education system."*

4.7: One of the intentions of the Bill is to turn the school categorisation process 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. All schools in Gwynedd, with the exception of two Secondary schools (Tywyn, Friars) and one primary school (Our Lady's School) are in Category 3T (Transitional).

4.8: In the secondary sector, there will be an emphasis on increasing the number of areas of learning available for study 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 Welsh Government expects to see an increase in the provision of education through the medium of Welsh over the next few years, and there is a statutory obligation for the local authorities to plan for this growth.

4.9: One of the objectives of the proposed changes to the current Education Language Policy is maintaining and increasing the use of the Welsh language. It will be expected for 70% of the teaching time in Gwynedd's schools to be through the medium of Welsh, with the remaining 30% to be used for the teaching of English as a subject, and as a teaching medium for some cross-curricular elements.

4.10: **As a result of any agreed amendments, and given the need to incorporate the Act in the Education Language Policy, it will be a statutory policy. The Current Education Language Policy is an exemplary policy.**

4.11: As part of the process of formulating the Policy, we as a Department will produce a detailed Equality Assessment and a Language Impact Assessment on its implementation.

4.12: We will also undertake a Public Consultation process.

5. Consultation (Engagement)

A series of meetings were held across the three regions over a two-month period from October to December 2024. We spent time with representation from primary, secondary, special and lifelong school headteachers:

Primary Schools:

Arfon: Our Lady's School, Ysgol Hiraef, Ysgol Llandygai, Ysgol Llanllechid, Ysgol Rhosgadfan.

Dwyfor: Ysgol y Gorlan, Ysgol Treferthyr, Ysgol Llanbedrog

Meirionnydd: Ysgol Cefn Coch, Ysgol Talsarnau, Ysgol y Traeth

Special Schools: Ysgol Hafod Lon and Ysgol Pendalar

Secondary Schools:

Arfon: Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, Ysgol Brynrefail, Ysgol Tryfan and Ysgol Friars, Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle

Dwyfor: Ysgol Botwnnog, Ysgol Eifionydd, Ysgol Glan y Môr

Meirionnydd: Ysgol y Moelwyn, Ysgol Ardudwy, Ysgol Tywyn

Lifelong Schools: Ysgol Bro Idris, Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn.

- 5.1** Pupils were also welcomed to the engagement meetings to discuss the language policy. Suitable and purposeful background documents were prepared for the age ranges of different learners. It was also ensured that the voices of a cross-section of Gwynedd's children and young people were listened to in the meetings. Children were selected from schools in the Welsh language strongholds in Gwynedd, and also from the more Anglicised areas, including a school that is in the transitional category in terms of the school's Welsh-medium provision.

Primary School Learners: Ysgol Cymerau, Ysgol Bro Hedd Wyn and Ysgol Cae Top

Secondary School Learners: Ysgol Botwnnog, Ysgol y Moelwyn, Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen and Ysgol Tywyn

Special School Learners: Ysgol Hafod Lon.

- 5.2** An engagement meeting was also held for the following representatives:

Language Organisations:

Cylch yr Iaith

Cymdeithas yr Iaith

Dyfodol yr Iaith

RHAG - Parents for Welsh Medium Education

- 5.3** We also welcomed representatives from the **Gwynedd Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillors: Jina Gwyrfai, Elwyn Jones, Beth Lawton, Richard Glyn Roberts and Rhys Tudur

- 5.4** The following Councillors were also welcomed, representing the **Language Committee:**

Councillors: Menna Baines, Meryl Roberts, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Alan Jones Evans and Olaf Cai Larsen.

5.5 A meeting was also arranged with representatives from the **Gwynedd Governors' Forum** and also a meeting with the Welsh Language Commissioner's officers.

6. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

6.1 The aim of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act places a well-being duty on public bodies which is aimed at delivering the seven well-being goals by following the five ways of working.

6.2 The Act places a well-being duty on the Council to carry out sustainable development work by working in cooperation with the 'sustainable development principle'. This means that the impact on people in the future must be considered when making decisions.

6.3 In terms of **collaborating and involving** others, we have already held engagement sessions between October and December 2024, see point 5 for more information.

6.4 During the engagement process the need to amend the current language policy in light of recent developments, including the 2021 census, was highlighted. Acting now provides an opportunity to respond to the situation and try to **prevent** a further decline in the number of Welsh-speaking learners aged 3-15.

6.5 Ensuring that the children and young people of Gwynedd develop into confident, bilingual citizens improves opportunities for them educationally, economically, culturally and socially in the **long-term** and enriches their experience of living and working through the medium of Welsh in Gwynedd.

6.6 Empowering the county's Education Language Policy is a solid foundation for developing bilingual citizens and complies with the status of the Welsh language in the context of Public Bodies.

7. Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-Economic Duty

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of formulating the final Language Policy. Consideration will be given to all the comments received as part of the consultation, and the Education Language Policy and the Equality Impact Assessment will be amended as appropriate according to the comments received.

8. Next Steps

8.1 Gwynedd Council Cabinet 13/5/25 or 10/6/25

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft Summary Education Language Policy

Appendix 2 - Strategy to Support Cyngor Gwynedd's Education Language Policy

Appendix 3 - One Page Policy

Appendix 4 – Key Messages of the Language Policy Engagement Meetings

Appendix 5 - Additional Questions