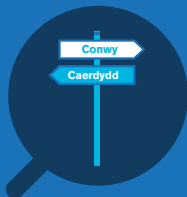




Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

Shwmae



# The Position of the Welsh Language 2016–20: Welsh Language Commissioner's 5-year Report

## Executive summary

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# Executive summary

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## Standards and strategy

The past five years have been a frenzy of significant political developments and debate relating to the Welsh language. However, there is no doubt that the development that grabbed the headlines was the publication of the Welsh Government's ambitious and long-term language strategy, *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers*. Another major development was seeing the first organisations starting to implement Welsh language standards. Taken together – and if fully implemented – these two developments have the potential to transform the position of the Welsh language over the next five years and for generations to come. The main aim of the Commissioner's second 5-year report on the position of the Welsh language between 2016 and 2020 is to scrutinise their implementation during their formative years.

There are no census results to be analysed in the report on this occasion, but the results of the 2011 Census have continued to have a major influence on the policy developments of the reporting period. The most obvious example, of course, is the quantitative target set out in the Government's strategy after the last census showed a decline in the number of Welsh speakers. Although the ambition to reach a million Welsh speakers was warmly welcomed at the time of its publication in 2017, there is some doubt as to whether the efforts to date are sufficient to achieve this. It is also likely that significant recovery work and investment will be required as a result of the impact of COVID-19 – something that was not planned for in formulating the strategy, of course.

There may sometimes be a risk of thinking that the strategy alone is sufficient to achieve its objectives. The reality is that its objectives and spirit need to be at the heart of every statement, policy and act if the Government is serious about reaching a million Welsh million speakers and increasing the daily use of the Welsh language.

The development that has had the most far-reaching impact on the position of the Welsh language in the public domain in recent years must be the introduction of the Welsh language standards. To date, 123 public organisations have specific legal duties relating to the Welsh language. These may relate to communicating with or delivering services to the public, formulating policies or using Welsh internally in the workplace.

The general perception among Welsh speakers is that Welsh language services are improving as a result and that they are able to use the Welsh language with public organisations if they wish to do so. However, although Welsh language services are increasingly available and arrangements are in place to facilitate the use of the Welsh language, there is no reliable data to show how much use is being made of the Welsh language when dealing with public organisations. There is also no requirement for those organisations that are subject to standards to monitor the use made of the Welsh language.

The second target of *Cymraeg 2050* is to double the daily use of the language and therefore careful, but urgent, consideration needs to be given as to how to measure that progress in a meaningful way. In order to see real progress, one of our consistent findings is that more needs to be done to promote the Welsh language services available. Even in the absence of robust data, it can be said with certainty that the number of people currently choosing to use Welsh language services does not match the number who can speak the language.

That is equally true of how many people use Welsh when dealing with businesses and charities. Without the Welsh language being prominent and convenient to use and Welsh language services being marketed and promoted, few Welsh speakers are likely to ask or take time to look for the Welsh option each time. And so if they are not aware that the Welsh language is available, they will not use the service and there will be no increase in the use of the language. That in turn can have a negative impact on attitudes to the language, causing organisations and businesses question the value of investing in the Welsh language at all. Ensuring that the Welsh language is available proactively and clearly is therefore essential in order to see an increase in the number of people using it. An overview of the efforts of the Commissioner's Hybu Team, and others, in this area can be found in Part 3.

While praising the change brought about by the standards, some organisations are still not complying with their language duties in full. One the whole, it is easier to receive written Welsh language services than to receive verbal or personal services, and services at the point of contact. This suggests that organisations need to recruit more Welsh speakers, and support less confident Welsh speakers, in order to be able to comply fully with the standards and offer consistent and reliable Welsh language services.

Not all public organisations are subject to standards either, and some continue to operate Welsh language schemes under the Welsh Language Act 1993. It has emerged, however, that the services of organisations operating language schemes are not available in Welsh to the same extent as those of organisations operating Welsh language standards. In that respect, it is significant that Ireland is now, in observing the success of the standards, following Wales' example by moving away from the system of language schemes to adopting a similar regime to the standards in Wales.

Despite the lack of quantitative data in terms of increasing the use of the Welsh language, Part 3 of the report addresses the availability of Welsh language services and the experiences of Welsh speakers in their use. Two case studies are also provided that specifically address the weaknesses in the Welsh language services that exist in prisons and within dementia care, emphasising that the Welsh language is not always a convenience or a preferred option – it can be a necessity.

## Reaching a million

It is easier to measure the primary aim of *Cymraeg 2050*, which is to increase the number of Welsh speakers, and although encouraging figures are published annually as a result of the Annual Population Survey and the National Survey for Wales, the census is the official source for measuring progress towards the million. The results of the 2021 Census will therefore be crucial in measuring whether we are on track to meet the Government's trajectory targets of achieving 600,000 speakers by 2021.

The education sector has been the focus of the effort to create new speakers for some years, and the trajectory for the one million speakers set by the Government relies heavily on this sector. It is fair to acknowledge that the past five years have been a period of considerable planning in the field, and perhaps that is responsible for the fact that there is still little real progress in the position of the Welsh language within statutory education. One of the most significant developments during the reporting period was the commitment to abolish the Welsh second language qualification and teaching programme and develop a single linguistic continuum for teaching Welsh across schools in Wales. However, it is not always clear that the *Cymraeg 2050* vision and commitments as noted above are fully mainstreamed into key developments in this area as in the case of the new curriculum. It will not be possible to assess the success of all these developments against the targets for *Cymraeg 2050* until they have been implemented, of course.

While the education system is vitally important to the aim of reaching a million speakers, increasing importance is now being placed on language transmission in the home in order to create Welsh speakers and maintain community and social use of the Welsh language. While those who learned Welsh at school are likely to choose Welsh-medium education for their children, they do not tend to transfer Welsh within the family. And when the language has not been transferred within the home, it is often heard that people do not use Welsh after leaving school and that they lack confidence in their Welsh language skills. The Welsh Government has developed a national policy in light of these findings on language transmission within the family which will be implemented during the next reporting period.

Where language transmission does not take place in the home, the best way to develop fluent and confident speakers is to immerse children in the Welsh language from a young age. With the Government's commitment to offer 30 hours a week free childcare to working parents with 3 and 4 year olds, significant investment has been made in childcare during the reporting period. Currently, however, 77% of childcare services in Wales operate mainly through the medium of English. Since the introduction of the free 30 hour Childcare Offer, 25% of all children accessing the scheme received childcare through the medium of Welsh, but that percentage varies widely by local authority. 75% of children benefiting from the scheme received care through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, while as few as 5% were cared for in Welsh or bilingually in many areas of the south east.

## Encompassing all communities

The above percentages are, of course, just one example of the variation in the position of the Welsh language in different areas and communities across the country. It is also proof of the need to introduce more interventions in areas where Welsh is not the predominant language as well as protecting those communities that are seen as strongholds of the Welsh language.

In that respect, the link between housing, work and language is one that continues to attract attention as young people leave rural areas, which are often strongholds of the Welsh language, to seek work. The inability of young people to afford to buy houses in rural areas and the increase in second home purchases is also a growing trend that is changing the fabric of communities, and one that will possibly intensify again as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the revolution in terms of remote working patterns. In 2019–20, it was estimated that 38% of houses sold in Gwynedd were purchased as second or holiday homes, and the figures were similar in Anglesey and Ceredigion also.

There has been a lack of consistency in the consideration given to the Welsh language in local authority planning policies, and it is not clear how considerations are translated into action locally or how they are monitored and evaluated. A local authority is not required to carry out a Welsh language impact assessment when dealing with individual planning applications, for example, only as part of the preparation of their local development plans covering wider areas than specific communities.

*Cymraeg 2050* recognises the importance of economic development allowing Welsh speakers to remain in Welsh-speaking communities or return to those communities. It is difficult to find evidence of the link between language vitality and employment opportunities, however, without experimenting and investing significantly in the economy in the areas considered to be strongholds of the language. The Welsh Government introduced the £2m experimental Arfor fund between 2016–20 to create more and better jobs to support the growth of the language in Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. But there is currently little evidence of the success of the project, and a one-off injection of funding without having a very specific purpose may not be sufficient to create an evidence base for the link between work and language.

Related to these communities is Welsh culture and social activity. The Urdd and the mentrau iaith continue to do vital work in maintaining and encouraging leisure activities and social opportunities in Welsh, and their contribution is discussed further in Part 3. S4C also supports the Government's efforts in reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050 and has developed its dedicated provision to serve new speakers by working with the National Centre for Learning Welsh and Mudiad Meithrin, for example.

Our use of digital media and technologies continues to increase, and there was a radical change in our use of them during 2020 with the COVID-19 crisis forcing virtually every aspect of our lives to move online. It is a continuous challenge for the Welsh language to try to keep up with developments in this area, and therefore the Government's Welsh language technology action plan was welcomed in 2018. The plan focuses on Welsh language speech technology, translation technology and conversational artificial intelligence and 19 of the 27 work packages have been completed or are in place.

Also during the reporting period, in 2016, the first prototype of a Welsh-language personal assistant system was introduced by Canolfan Bedwyr's Language Technologies Unit. Overall, major developments in Welsh-language technology have been slow and it is difficult to persuade global companies to include the Welsh language as part of their products. Having said that, success does not always require the support of the large companies. The Language Technologies Unit Ap Geiriaduron (Welsh-English dictionary app) is proof of that and was downloaded over 145,000 times between 2015–19. Another example of success in terms of technology is the Welsh language Wikipedia which now contains over 131,000 articles – a threshold that is considered internationally significant in terms of language presence online.

Including the Welsh language in technology developments is vital if it is to remain relevant to our way of life today. And seeing the Welsh language used by high street shops or on the international stage affects people's perception of the language and its relevance to the everyday life and activities of Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers alike.

## Ensuring status

The Welsh language has had official status in Wales since 2011, and Part 1 examines how that has been reflected in a variety of ways over the reporting period. The Welsh language was used for the first time in the Supreme Court; it became a core part of the administrative justice system in Wales as individuals were able to complain to the Commissioner about the lack of a Welsh language service; and the equal status of the English and Welsh texts of legislation was endorsed in the Legislation (Wales) Act 2019. However, although the language is given official status in the Welsh Language Measure, it is an omission not to include status planning and language prestige in the Welsh language strategy, particularly when it has lost its 'co-official' status in Europe as a result of Brexit.

The policy making standards place a clear responsibility on Welsh Ministers and other organisations to consider how their intentions may affect the position of the Welsh language as a whole. This ensures, by statute, that the Welsh language has a place at the heart of policy making in Wales, and seeing references to the language in policies and legislation contributes, not only practically, but also symbolically to the status and prestige of the Welsh language. The policy making standards are not simply a mechanism to identify and mitigate risks of discrimination against Welsh speakers. Rather, they are there to ensure that the decisions made by an organisation contribute to the objectives of increasing the use of the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. There is therefore a duty to seek out positive effects as well as to mitigate adverse ones.

There have been several significant policy developments in relation to the Welsh language over the last five years, and the journey of implementing those policies in practice has only just begun. As the standards came into force, we saw how the introduction of this significant change to the system can lead to positive changes in the position of the Welsh language. Without doubt, further radical policies will be needed in many areas in order to see a step change over the next few years and to see the number of Welsh speakers, together with the use of the language, increasing in Wales.





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