

National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families

Consultation Response Form

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Consultation Questions :

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here:

1. This draft policy sets out our proposed actions to support and increase Welsh language transmission in families.
 - a. Will the actions we propose allow us to do this?

Although there are several specific action points, the vast majority of the actions are fairly ambiguous and they do not include much detail about what exactly the Government will be doing. For example, action 2 notes that the Government will 'create new initiatives building on our existing work to support Welsh language transmission in families. They'll use the latest scientific developments to change behaviours.' Although this appears to be positive, it is difficult to provide comments on such actions, as there is no detail regarding what exactly these projects will be and how behaviour is intended to be changed. The same is largely true for actions 3, 4, 6 and 7. We do not disagree with the policy intention, but it would be useful to have more information regarding these actions in order to provide meaningful feedback and input.

The draft policy is very clear that the focus of the document is language transmission at home, and although other matters such as education and social use of Welsh are extremely relevant, this is not the focus of this specific policy. However, it is very possible that some of these other policy areas are more significant in the context of achieving the objectives of this policy.

As research on language transmission at home emphasises, changing the language practices of individuals and families is not something which is easy to influence through national policies and strategies. Usually, the language used at home is an unconscious decision (or practice), and one which is a result of the individual's experience and personal and social situation. There are numerous factors influencing this, including the adult's language of upbringing, the adult's experiences with the language, the language spoken with friends, as well as the community networks surrounding them. This means that it is difficult to influence language

decisions and practices at home through individual intervention, and it requires a range of interventions which would impact an individual's holistic experience over a longer period of time. From this perspective, it can be argued that increasing Welsh transmission rates at home is a result or a reflection of the success of the Government's wider policies in areas such as childcare and education, Welsh in the workplace, Welsh courses for adults and social use of Welsh. These will in turn, of course, be influenced by the wider economic policies and strategies of the Government. It is possible that policies in these areas are more significant in terms of increasing language transmission rates at home than the policies which focus specifically on language transmission at home (namely the focus of the policy in question). The other side of this of course is that wider policy decisions can completely undermine the objectives of this draft policy (for example if funding were cut or strategies dropped in areas such as child care, further and higher education, Welsh in the workplace and so on), and therefore it is vital that this policy considers and discusses these wider matters in detail.

Of course, this does not mean that there is no need for a national policy which focuses on language transmission at home, and it is clear that the above policy areas can complement each other. However, we would wish to have a clearer discussion and acknowledgement regarding the relevance of the wider policy areas in terms of achieving the objectives of this specific policy. It may be useful to include some kind of list of actions or wider indicators which are significant in terms of achieving the objectives of this language transmission policy.

b. Are there any actions missing from the draft policy?

Lack of actions regarding the role of midwives and health visitors in encouraging families to speak Welsh to their children

The consultation document notes that the Government is already working with NHS Wales midwives and health visitors to help build a better understanding of early language transmission. The *Cymraeg 2050* work programme for 2017-21 includes the commitment to 'work with NHS Wales to ensure that midwives, health visitors and other partners share information about the benefits of language transmission as early as possible, and that new and prospective parents understand what support is available to them'.

However, the actions for the draft policy do not refer to this. Although the commitment to continue to work with the NHS is already a part of the *Cymraeg 2050* work programme, this does not mean that it should not be included as one of the core actions of the policy in question. It should also be explained how some of the other actions can be achieved more effectively by working with the NHS and midwives (especially the actions regarding sharing information and communicating with parents). It is unclear to us why this policy is considered as something which sits side by side with the work regarding the NHS and *Cymraeg for Kids*, rather than this policy being placed above these work programmes.

A recent example that was brought to our attention by a member of the public is the references made on Flying Start's Facebook pages to the BBC's 'Tiny Happy People' digital resource. Unfortunately the majority of the resources are available in English only, including those resources which provide guidance on how parents should communicate with their children in order to develop their speech and language skills. Whilst we understand that this is not the Government's responsibility (as it is a resource developed by the BBC at an UK level) and there is no failure of compliance from a Welsh language standards perspective, the Welsh Government's '*Talk with me: Speech, Language and Communication Delivery Plan (2020-21)*' did refer to the resource as one of the key action points of the strategy.¹ In order to achieve the objectives of this strategy relating to language transmission, it is essential that there is consistency in the Government's messaging and campaigns, and that issues relating to Welsh language transmission becomes a normalised aspect of the work of midwives and health visitors. Towards this end, it would be a positive step in the right direction if the Government could use all available means to ensure that such resources are available in Welsh as well as English, and that specific resources are developed which deal with issues of Welsh language transmission at home.

A lack of actions regarding conducting and developing Cymraeg for Kids and Camau projects and the work of the Mudiad Meithrin in general

There is a section in the draft policy which discusses what the Government has done already. Here there is a discussion of the Government's previous *Twf* project, as well as the current *Cymraeg for Kids* and *Camau* projects. The *Cymraeg 2050* work programme for 2017-21 includes the commitment to 'review and refine the *Cymraeg for Kids* Programme to ensure that it continues to provide parents/carers with the information and support they need to make an informed choice about introducing the Welsh language to their child in the home'. The work programme also notes that the Government will ensure that the *Cymraeg for Kids* programme reflects the aims of the policy on Welsh transmission in families.

Once again, it is unclear why these commitments are not included as a core part of the actions of the policy in question. Although the *Cymraeg for Kids* programme focuses on encouraging parents to consider Welsh medium education for their children, it also contributes significantly to increasing use of the language within families. We would have expected to see a commitment to maintain and develop this project programme as an action, as well as a discussion on how this significant programme aligns and contributes to achieving some of the other actions of the policy in question.

As the consultation document notes, although the *Camau* project doesn't focus on Welsh language transmission in families, it does contribute significantly to the objectives of the draft policy. The statistics on Welsh language use emphasise that learning Welsh from the very start of the education system is essential in order to produce fluent Welsh speakers who want to use the language and possibly transfer it

¹ <https://gov.wales/speech-language-and-communication-delivery-plan-2020-2021>

to the next generation. Increasing the number of practitioners who can offer child care and early years education through the medium of Welsh is vital in the context of the objectives of this draft policy. However, there is no reference to this in the actions.

In relation to the above, the actions do not refer specifically to the general work of the Mudiad Meithrin, especially in relation to programmes such as *Ti a Fi* and *Clwb Cwtsh*. Not only do these programmes contribute directly to the objectives of this draft policy, but it is possible that they are a medium to contribute to achieving some of the other actions which are included in the draft policy. For example, these programmes are an effective way of sharing messages and communicating with new parents, and also encouraging them to consider using Welsh at home.

Our response to the first two questions of this consultation highlights that there is a lack of adequate cross-referencing to the Government's different policies, strategies and work streams. We believe that this somewhat undermines the success of this policy in coordinating the various interventions which contribute to language transmission at home, and doing so within one comprehensive, coherent and universal framework.

The need to consider further actions which focus more on informal opportunities to encourage and share messages regarding using Welsh at home

Action 10 regarding creating projects to use parent/carer networks around schools is interesting, and we would like more detail, or more similar actions. It would be interesting to consider in more detail the different situations where parents and children come together informally, for example in parties, in sporting events, and in various activities which occur in connection with the school (eisteddfodau, school trips and so on). We accept that it is not easy to create national policies to address matters like this, but there are events where parents and children come together and there is significant potential in terms of sharing messages, offering opportunities to develop confidence and to change linguistic practices. Events such as this are positioned somewhere between formal opportunities to use the language (at school, in work, in classes) and use of the language at home. There are examples of these kinds of projects in the Basque Country, albeit on a local scale. For example, the *Parketarrak*² programme offers play activities through the medium of Basque in Donosti's (San Sebastian) public parks. The role of local sports club as places where people congregate and socialise should be considered, especially in terms of providing opportunities to use the Welsh language socially and where Welsh speakers can offer support and encouragement to other families. The Commissioner, for example, launched the *Amdani!*³ Campaign, which encouraged the use of Welsh in sport clubs across Wales. There is a similar project in Donosti focused on the town's sports clubs. See San Sebastian's 2015-19 Basque Promotion Strategy⁴ for

² <http://www.donostiaeuskaraz.eus/euskaraz/euskara-erabili/sekzioak/parkean-euskaraz--parketarrak-egitasmoa/lang/eu> (Spanish/Basque website)

³ <http://www.comisiynyddygyraeg.cymru/hybu/cy/canllawiau/Pages/amdani!.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.donostiaeuskaraz.eus/euskaraz/euskara-donostian/sekzioak/donostiako-euskararen-plan-orokorra--20152019/lang/eu> (Spanish/Basque website, see page 16)

further information.

In relation to this, there may be a need to consider in more detail the role of parents/carers who speak Welsh at home in order to convince and support other families. Actions 5 and 10 mention the intention to consider how parents/carers can support each other, but there is no detail regarding this. It would be useful to explain how Welsh speakers can be equipped to support others, and maybe actions which aim to increase Welsh speakers' knowledge and understanding regarding their role in this context need to be considered. Once again, it might be worth considering examples from the Basque Country, where there exists promotion workshops named Zerkatik ez? (Why not?)⁵ in Donosti which caters for Basque speakers, learners, and various groups and clubs. Another interesting example from the Basque country is a project which focuses on the influence of individuals who are part of a close network of friends (cuadrillas) on the language of those groups.

The role of social organisations and leaders

The previous point suggests the need for more local planning and in a more informal way, and in this context the role of different social organisations and leaders should be considered. Organisations such as Mentrau Iaith and the Urdd have a clear potential in terms of contributing to the achievement of the objectives of this draft policy. It may be useful to include some kind of mapping work to identify all the social organisations and groups which can contribute to the objectives of the policy, as well as a strategy for coordinating this work in terms of encouraging families to speak Welsh.

Technology, the media and famous role models

The draft policy emphasises the importance of technology in terms of sharing messages and influencing families. Action 12 notes specifically the intention to explore the opportunities technology offers to increase the use of Welsh in the household. In this context, it would be useful to consider the role of the media, and social media specifically, in sharing messages. Once again, we accept that it is not easy to use the media to share specific messages, but it is clear that the media has an extremely significant potential in this context. For example, fairly strong anecdotal evidence exists in terms of the influential role of the Wales football team, and the related attention in the media, on national feeling and possibly attitudes towards the language. The Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy notes on page 65 that 'coverage of Welsh life and society – including the Welsh language culture – is sparse in UK newspapers and UK broadcasting Services, the main media outputs in Wales. The image of Wales in the UK media needs to better reflect the rich and varied culture of our country, and this includes awareness of the Welsh language.' We therefore suggest that you consider ways of promoting positive attitudes towards the Welsh language by improving the way the Welsh language is portrayed in the English medium media in Wales. Our earlier comments regarding Tiny Happy

⁵ <http://www.donostiaeuskaraz.eus/euskaraz/euskara-erabili/sekzioak/motibazio-saioak/lang/eu>
(Spanish/Basque website)

People are relevant in this respect.

Actions which target the role of children and young people specifically

One of the principles which are the basis of the draft policy is the fact that children are individuals and have their own sense of agency. They aren't just passive recipients of a language from parents/carers, and therefore they have the ability to influence the linguistic practices of their parents and family. Although action 7 relates to increasing children's use of Welsh with each other and their family, there are no actions which focus specifically on the role of children and young people as social agents who have the potential to change the linguistic practices of their family. Maybe developing an ambassador programme could be considered where the children themselves would be equipped to lead on increasing the use of Welsh at home. It is possible that this could be considered in the context of the first action of the draft policy, namely to trial a language use pledge programme adapted from the Euskalaradia programme in the Basque country.

c. Should we take a different approach to some of these actions?

As noted above, we would like several of the actions to be more specific and avoid general and ambiguous commitments. We would also like to see actions which refer specifically to maintaining and developing the projects and programmes which already contribute significantly to the objectives of this draft policy.

2. This draft policy is intended to inform a ten-year programme of work. Are there any actions which should be implemented before others?

Action 21, namely establishing a programme board to manage this work is positive, and it would make sense to establish this board as the first step of implementing the rest of the policy. Establishing a programme board would provide an effective forum to receive feedback from key stakeholders on the detail of the projects and strategies in question. It could also be used as a means of gathering feedback from various stakeholders on the detail of specific projects and strategies, and could bring together the various partners and agencies that work with children, young people, and their families.

Action 13 notes the intention to review the Government's existing work on Welsh language transmission in families. It would make sense that this action is implemented as soon as possible, in order to inform the implementation of the rest of the policy.

Action 1 (language use pledge programme) and action 10 (parent/carer networks) appear particularly interesting and have the potential to influence families' use of Welsh. We would therefore be eager to see these actions being implemented as soon as possible. As you are aware, *Euskarladia* is a national campaign where fluent and passive Basque speakers make a commitment to communicate with each other in Basque, and this is symbolised by the wearing of a badge which indicates their ability and desire to speak the language. It would be useful to receive further information on how you intend to adapt this project in order to increase the use of Welsh within families, and whether there is an intention to use badges such as those already used with Iaith Gwaith, which is recognized across Wales. We would be interested to receive more information regarding action points 1 and 10, including a timescale for their implementation.

3. This draft policy is based on how we want to:
 - i. Inspire today's generation of children and young people to speak Welsh to their children in the future.
 - ii. Reignite the Welsh language skills of those who may not have used Welsh since their school days, or who have lost confidence in their language skills, to speak Welsh with their own children.
 - iii. Support and encourage use of Welsh within families where not everybody speaks Welsh.
 - iv. Support Welsh-speaking families to speak Welsh with their children.
 - a. Does this policy give sufficient attention to each of these four aims?

We notice that the second point refers to 'reigniting' the Welsh language skills of those who may not have used Welsh since their school days. Although this is important, we would argue that there is also a need to focus on maintaining individuals' Welsh language skills once they have left school. Rather than concentrating on restoring a situation where individuals have already lost confidence in the language, maybe more focus is needed on interventions which would prevent this from happening in the first place. That is, concentrating on interventions which would maintain the skills of Welsh speakers, and ensure that they do not lose confidence, and that they are therefore more likely to speak Welsh to their own children.

This supports the point already made above regarding the importance of other policy areas, for example further education, higher education, apprenticeships, use of Welsh at work, and social use of the language. We know that census statistics show that a significant number of individuals lose confidence and stop using Welsh once they have finished statutory education. The period between individuals leaving school and starting to raise a family is a fertile area for policy interventions which aim to maintain and develop Welsh speakers' linguistic skills, and thereby increasing the likelihood that they will transmit the language to their own children.

b. Are there any other aims which should be addressed in the policy?

As the consultation document discusses, there is an important difference between donating a language (by choosing Welsh medium education for children) and transmitting a language at home. Although both matters are connected, the policy in question focuses specifically on transmitting a language at home.

The consultation document notes that language transmission at home contributes to the two main targets of *Cymraeg 2050*, namely increasing the numbers of Welsh speakers and also increasing use of the language. However, it appears that the interventions which are part of the action plan concentrate mainly on increasing families' use of the language. That is, the policy targets specifically parents who can speak Welsh but who do not use the language with the children at home. It is often the case that these individuals choose to send their children to Welsh medium education, and therefore the children are likely to develop to be Welsh speakers. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this policy is to encourage parents to go further than donating a language to their children, by also transmitting and using it at home. This is the most robust way of creating confident Welsh speakers who will use the language and in turn transmit the language to their own children.

Many of the actions in the draft policy refer to communicating with parents/carers and to the type of messages that will be transmitted in order to support families to use the Welsh language. There may be a need to consider in more detail how to explain to parents and families the important difference between donating and transmitting a language, as well as the associated implications for their children's linguistic development. This is particularly true considering that the research which exists about language transmission at home notes that parents are often unaware of this difference, and tend to consider the education system as a medium for transmitting the Welsh language.