



RHIENI DROS ADDYSG GYMRAEG

Evidence for the Committee of Experts

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

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RhAG appreciates the opportunity of discussing Welsh medium education with the Committee in person, and now wishes to present the following comments for your consideration.

If you wish clarification on any points raised, please contact us.



Parents for Welsh Medium Education

RhAG is an organisation that represents parents of pupils attending Welsh medium schools. RhAG believes, as does the Welsh Government's Education Strategy for Wales, that Welsh medium schools are the model that delivers the best overall skills in Welsh and English.

RhAG was established in 1952 by parents who then often had to campaign for Welsh medium education for their children at a time when Welsh education was exceptional, and had not been accepted by many education authorities.

RhAG is not a lobby group now, but a body that has developed expertise, with a network of members across Wales who can advise and assist local authorities and government departments on developing and implementing plans to provide Welsh language education. RhAG has an important role as a body which is independent of the government to help the government to realise its language strategy and as a group representing parents who are interested in Welsh education and who can offer their experience and expertise. RhAG is therefore a valuable and essential link between parents and Welsh medium schools Welsh and local government and central government.

As we note below, RhAG's role has changed significantly over the years, as the number of Welsh schools increases, and as Welsh education is generally accepted.

The basic principles of RhAG have now been accepted at county and national level, including two key elements:

- **Welsh education strategy**
- **Measuring the demand for Welsh education**

The promotion of Welsh education, however, remains one of the utmost importance, and RhAG is cooperating with local authorities and with the Welsh Government to increase this sector, from nursery to higher education. The general emphasis of RhAG's work from the outset has been on the statutory education sector.

RhAG has county branches, and a body of volunteers. RhAG's work has developed by appointing a central Development Officer, and a central office, thanks

to a grant initially received from the Welsh Language Board and now from the Welsh Government. Over the last two years, RhAG has been lucky enough to share the office of its Development Officer with the Main Office of Mudiad Meithrin in Cardiff. There is no doubt that this enables RhAG to work with Mudiad Meithrin in the development of Welsh-medium education, as well as strengthening the partnership between both organisations.

LOCAL BRANCHES

Swansea
Blaenau Gwent
Burry Port, Carmarthenshire
Cardiff
Caerphilly
Newport
Neath Port Talbot
Monmouth
Powys - Brecon + Builth Wells (RhAG South Powys)
RCT (county committee) + local Llantrisant + Llwynycelyn groups
Torfaen
Wrexham

RHAG'S DAILY WORK

There are many aspects of RhAG's daily work. It is carried out mainly through letters, correspondence, reports and responses, researching and attending meetings.

A constant activity is correspondence with parents and the various counties on individual issues that arise, including policy issues.

RhAG responds consistently to numerous Welsh Government consultations and offers comments and advice. This includes comments on education skills, transportation, and other issues affecting Welsh education.

RhAG considers itself a positive critical friend of education authorities and government departments, and continually takes the opportunity to meet public representatives, councillors and AMs, and education administrators at county and national level.

There was a time when the development of Welsh medium education was a matter only for local authorities. Although Welsh-medium education has developed since World War II, this has often occurred without a pattern, at random, and depended on authorities' attitudes towards Welsh-medium education.

RhAG has been at the forefront in arguing that Welsh Government needed to have a Welsh Education Strategy and obtaining this has in turn transformed the way that RhAG operates as an organisation.

The role of RhAG has evolved over the years from a group which had to struggle on the part of parents to establish Welsh-medium schools from the 1950s onwards, to a body that consults with education authorities, and crystallizes the aspirations of parents in order to advise on how to develop Welsh medium education.

As Wales develops its democracy, RhAG has taken advantage of the new systems and has become a body that promotes the goals set by the Government.

This is done

- by keeping in close contact with parents, by providing information on its website on Welsh medium education, and by presenting cases of individual parents and parent groups to local authorities.
- through close liaison with the Welsh Language Board, and now the Welsh Government, at the level of national and local officers.
- by holding regular meetings with local authorities to discuss Welsh Education Schemes
- Sitting on working groups monitoring the Welsh Education Schemes of local authorities
- Sitting on Language Forum Initiatives across Wales
- Regular meetings with Assembly Members and Ministers
- Representing Welsh medium education at an international level, welcoming groups representing minority languages and attending events overseas. There has been contact with Estonians, and some of the Russian Federation and the Basques.
- Presenting evidence to the European Commission's Committee of Experts on Minority Languages
- An executive member of the umbrella group Mudiadau Dathlu'r Gymraeg (Celebrating Our Language) www.dathlu.org
- Presenting evidence to scrutiny committees and the Welsh Government on language education issues
- Submitting detailed information of what is happening on the ground to officials of the Welsh Language Board, the counties and to the Government.
- Conducting research among parents and schools in different counties, e.g. the impact of transport on Welsh education, the demand for Welsh medium education in a particular area.
- Publicising Welsh medium education in the press and media.
- Holding a Conference and AGM to allow parents across Wales to come together to discuss and compare experiences on the ground
- Producing information leaflets to promote new Welsh schools.

Consequently, there has been development in Welsh education across Wales. We can claim that the growth of Welsh medium schools has accelerated dramatically since RhAG obtained a public grant to develop its activities. It has become a professional organisation with influence far beyond the number of paid staff.

The Welsh Language Board has now come to an end, and RhAG will maintain and develop its role in partnership with the Welsh Government.

RhAG also looks forward in continuing to be able to influence both at county and national level.

We look forward to the creative development of Welsh-medium education, and to be fully involved in its development.

EDUCATION AUTHORITY MEETINGS

Regular meetings were held with several LEAs in Wales over the last 5 years. RhAG is accepted as an advisory body by a growing number of authorities. This means that RhAG has contributed to the development of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans of various counties.

The Education Authorities with whom RhAG held discussion recently include:

Swansea
Neath Port Talbot
Bridgend
Blaenau Gwent
The Vale of Glamorgan
Ceredigion
Denbigh
RCT
Newport
Cardiff
Flint
Wrexham
Powys
Merthyr
Monmouth
Carmarthenshire
Caerphilly
Torfaen

REPORTS / RESPONSES PRODUCED:

During the last five years, RhAG has produced around fifty reports and responses, on local government and central government level. These include responses to Welsh in Education Strategic Plans of local authorities as well as commenting on various developments in education in Wales.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

When local authorities refused to allow pupils access to Welsh medium schools, without good cause, RhAG was able to challenge decisions in many parts of Wales. It has won countless cases before Independent Appeal Panels, including appeals for school admission and transport.

WELSH SCHOOLS ESTABLISHED DURING THE LAST DECADE

RhAG celebrates the fact that a significant number of Welsh schools have been established since RhAG appointed a Development Officer.

Here is a summary:

Swansea

A new building for Ysgol Gymraeg Llwynderw 2009
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tan-y-lan, Treforys, 2011
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg y Cwm, Bonymaen, 2012

Cardiff

Ysgol Tan yr Eos, Treganna - 2007
Ysgol Nant Caerau, Trelai - 2007
Ysgol Pen-y-Pil, Trowbridge- 2007
Ysgol Pen-y-groes, Pentwyn - 2009
Ysgol Glan Ceubal - 2009
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern, 2012
A new building for Ysgol Treganna (to open September 2013)

Caerphilly

Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen, 2007

Ysgol Penalltau, 2009

The Vale of Glamorgan

Ysgol Dewi Sant, Llantwit Major 2011

Ysgol Nant Talwg, Barry 2011

Newport

Ysgol Gymraeg Ifor Hael, 2008

Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon, 2011

Bridgend

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd, 2008

Pembrokeshire

(Proposed new primary school) Fishguard, September 2015

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llanhari – 2012

Torfaen

Ysgol Panteg, Griffithstown, 2010

Wrexham

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Gwersyllt, (to open September 2013)

Article 8 - Education

1a (i) to make available pre-school education in Welsh

1. Transport

RhAG has made several representations in the last four years, and has argued for making pre-school education a 'voluntary-statutory' sector. This would have the effect of making transport to the public sector available statutorily.

Because Welsh medium provision is generally more distant from homes than English medium provision in lesser Welsh speaking parts of Wales, making free transport available would to some extent make good this inequality.

The lack of ease in attending Welsh medium provision has a subsequent effect on numbers attending Welsh primary education.

We noted in 2009 that no free transport is available for pre-school children, and this continues to be the case.

This lack of free transport makes it particularly difficult for disadvantaged parents to send their children to Welsh medium pre-school provision.

2. School acceptance numbers

Schools have been given a number ceiling for accepting pupils. In the Welsh medium sector, this regulation puts pressure on schools to refuse children. In practice it has been found that schools have two choices:

- i. To refuse children after the number has been reached;
- ii. To accept the children. This is made possible where nearby Welsh medium schools are filled to capacity, and local authorities then have to cope by providing temporary accommodation. This puts pressure on school space, and school facilities.

A further effect of the awareness that a Welsh medium school is 'full' is that parents themselves choose not to send their children to Welsh medium education.

3. Measurement of demand

The demand for Welsh education is now measured widely, although not by all authorities. Many authorities do this by using lists of recently born children, and so parents who express a wish for Welsh medium education would expect that provision to be readily available at pre-school age. A lack of places and a lack of transport can often be obstacles as the sector is non-statutory. There are links missing in the chain that links demand to provision.

4. Flying Start provision

Flying Start is the Welsh Government targeted Early Years programme for families with children under 4 years of age in some of the most deprived areas of Wales and is one of the Welsh Government's top priorities. However, Welsh-medium places within this programme is worryingly low. In many areas there are a very limited number of Welsh-medium places available; for families from less privileged backgrounds accessibility, distance and lack of transport are the main barriers to accessing Welsh-medium places. Welsh-medium provision should be accessible to all and shouldn't be dependent on wealth. It is vital that this is rectified since this is a key access point for children to the Welsh-medium sector, and if there isn't parity of provision in terms of linguistic choice then it is highly unlikely that these children won't be offered the opportunity to access Welsh-medium provision at a statutory age. The highest percentage within any given Authority is 10% of Flying Start allocated to the Welsh-medium sector, but in general it is much less than this. This raises fundamental questions about entitlement and equality issues. There should be a correlation between the percentage of WM Flying Start places available and the percentage of children within the Welsh-medium sector within each Authority.

1 b i to make available primary education in Welsh

1. Lack of provision in anglicised counties

The demand for Welsh medium education, as measured in around 14 counties, has been found to be consistently between around 30% and 40%. In most of the counties where the demand has been measure, the provision is between 5% and 15%.

Although progress has been made in measuring demand, no clear directive has been given as to how local authorities should go about increasing provision. Some authorities (e.g. Vale of Glamorgan) have been pro-active, while others (e.g. Neath Port Talbot) have shown a distinct lack of will to increase provision.

As acting on the measurement of demand is not statutory, the progress made in increasing Welsh medium education is far too slow.

Welsh-medium provision in some local Authorities who have measured parental demand

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Percentage of the demand according to survey, 2009</i>	<i>% of 7 year olds receiving Welsh-medium education, 2011</i>
Newport	40%	3.9%
Wrexham	44%	11.7%
Swansea	38%	12.6%
Torfaen	33%	9.4%
Monmouthshire	23%	4.4%

3. Cumbersome procedures

The Strategy, at present, makes little attempt to facilitate the provision of extra Welsh medium schools. The process of establishing new Welsh medium schools continues to be cumbersome. As we noted in 2009, it involves difficulties in respect of lack of capital spending available; it must respond to falling numbers in the English medium sector, and await consequent reorganisation; there are difficulties in allocating new sites for schools, and the legal process is time consuming.

The Welsh Government should give local authorities targets for expanding the number of Welsh medium schools. In a publication, *Growth of Welsh Medium Education in Wales, 2012-2012*, RhAG has argued that a further 67 classes are needed to attain the Government target of 30% of pupils in Welsh schools by 2020.

There is little hope that this target will be reached unless the Welsh Government issues specific instructions to local authorities. Some local authorities, such as Cardiff, are now clearly dragging their feet.

There have been particular difficulties in Carmarthenshire, where the Welsh medium primary schools in Ammanford and in Burry Port are overcrowded, with children refused admittance. After some years of debate, there is some movement there now.

As we noted in 2009, it can be considered that Welsh medium education is freely available in Gwynedd and in large parts of some other counties, but is still

restricted in anglicised counties, and the provision in these falls far below the measured demand.

1 c i to make available secondary education in Welsh

1. Lack of provision

Although a new Welsh medium secondary school has been established in Cardiff since our comments in 2009, Welsh medium education is still not available in every county. There is no Welsh medium secondary school in Powys, which covers a large part of mid Wales. There has been slow progress to set up another secondary to serve the south-eastern counties, and this has resulted in the one school that serves these to be crowded, and nothing has lightened travelling large distances for some pupils, some of whom travel in excess of 2 hours daily.

Some difficulties have arisen regarding transport. Recently Neath Port Talbot suggested that post 16 pupils should pay £270 per year to travel to school. Whereas this would only affect 10% of the pupils in the county, it would affect 90% of pupils attending Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera, the only Welsh medium secondary school in the county. Recently a compromise of £100 per year has been reached. We are fearful that other counties will propose similar plans to Neath Port Talbot.

RhAG has again been involved with legal appeals on behalf of parents in Powys who wish their children to attend Welsh medium secondary schools outside the county.

2. Progression from primary to secondary education

The transfer of pupils from Welsh medium primary education to Welsh medium secondary education is still problematic in some parts of Wales. Although the Welsh Government set targets to ensure better progression, some counties have been slow to act.

It is hoped that school reorganisation in Carmarthenshire will solve part of the longstanding problem in eastern parts of the county, but there are still substantial losses from first language primary pupils to second language secondary pupils in the western part of the country.

In Carmarthenshire as a whole, 55.7% of 7 year old pupils attended Welsh medium education in 2012 (2001: 51.5%; 2011: 55.6%). However in 2012 just 36.5% of 14 year old pupils were assessed in Welsh first language (2010: 36%; 2011: 36%). This averages at around a loss of 35% from Welsh first language to Welsh second language. The County's policy is to increase the percentage of 14 year old pupils studying Welsh as a first language to 39% by 2015, but this still represents a substantial loss.

Estyn, the inspectorate of schools, has consistently failed to report on this issue when inspecting individual schools. For example in the 2012 inspection of Cwm Tawe secondary school, Estyn notes that 15% of the pupils have studied Welsh as a first language in primary schools, and reports that the school's standard in 2nd language Welsh is 'significantly higher than the national average'. This school does not offer Welsh as first language, and one must conclude that first language pupils sit the second language examination, which is clearly a misuse of the education system.

There are schools in Conwy and Gwynedd where a similar failure regularly occurs. WJEC/CBAC, the examination body, regularly fails to respond to this situation.

Teaching Welsh on a continuum would solve the issue as it would not be enable pupils to achieve a high grade on an inappropriate level.

1 d (iv) Technical and vocational education

The provision of Welsh medium education in 14-19 learning paths in Welsh medium schools has increased, as vocational courses have been developed.

Welsh medium secondary schools have showed a willingness to co-operate with each other and with colleges of further education to increase Welsh medium provision in this sector.

Figures revealed recently on the funding learning in the workplace, including apprenticeships, show that less than £4000 was spent on Welsh medium education out of a total of £17million.

The provision of Welsh medium education in further education establishments, however, is still very far from satisfactory. The Welsh Government has recently announced an annual grant of £50,000 to five colleges for three years to employ a facilitator with the aim of increasing the use of Welsh in these establishments.

The Welsh Government, in its Welsh Medium Education Strategy (2010), has acknowledged that sixth form classes in Welsh medium schools are the main providers of Welsh medium education in this age group, and that, in spite of many initiatives over many years, the Welsh medium provision of further education colleges remains low.

1 e (i) ...encourage and/or allow the provision of university or other forms of higher education in Welsh...

We look forward to see the effect that the establishment of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol will have on developing Welsh medium provision in higher education.

The Welsh Government's decision to give equal subsidy to students from Wales who study in other parts of the UK as is given to those who study in Wales is having a detrimental effect on the numbers staying in Wales to study and therefore on the numbers available for Welsh medium courses.

Scotland and Northern Ireland have decided not to subsidise their students who study in other parts of the UK.

1 f (ii) to offer Welsh as a subject of adult and continuing education

A Government working party is at present looking at the provision of teaching Welsh to adults. We are looking forward to its conclusions, in the hope that a system will be put in place that can link the teaching of Welsh to adults to the linguistic needs of a bilingual country.

1 g to make arrangements to ensure the teaching of the history and the culture which is reflected by the regional or minority language;

A Government working party is at present looking at the teaching of history and we are looking forward to its conclusion, and hope that future provision will give adequate Welsh historical context to school studies.

1 h to provide the basic and further training of the teachers required to implement those of paragraphs a to g accepted by the Party;

It has been acknowledged that there is a dearth of qualified Welsh speaking teachers in English medium schools, where Welsh is taught as a compulsory subject.

Although there are schemes to release teachers to improve their language skills, a large-scale year release programme is needed to teach Welsh to an adequate number of teachers.

1 i to set up a supervisory body or bodies responsible for monitoring the measures taken and progress achieved in establishing or developing the teaching of regional or minority languages and for drawing up periodic reports of their findings, which will be made public.

The Welsh Government has developed its responsibility for monitoring progress. The Welsh medium Education Strategy contains five and ten year targets, but there is little evidence that these targets are being met. There is a distinct lack of connection between the targets and the means of delivering them.