



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Mandatory status of English in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill: summary of responses

Results of online survey and stakeholder sessions into the mandatory status of English in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

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Introduction

1. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill ('the Bill') lists four mandatory elements that must be included and taught in a curriculum from ages three to sixteen:
 - a. English
 - b. Relationships and Sexuality Education
 - c. Religion, Values and Ethics
 - d. Welsh
2. However, to enable Welsh-medium schools to continue to practise Welsh language immersion – where little or no English is taught or used as a language medium before age seven – the Bill gave schools and funded non-maintained nurseries a power to make a determination to disapply the mandatory element of English for ages three to seven.
3. Following the publication of the Bill, concerns were raised about the

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mandatory status of English and its effect on Welsh language immersion. The main concern was that requiring English to be disapplied in order to practise Welsh language immersion actually creates a barrier. This concern is based on the view that the Bill, as laid, makes Welsh language immersion appear to be a departure from a bilingual norm. This is not the case in all schools or in all parts of Wales where immersion is the norm. Other concerns raised were that this disapplication had the potential to create a focal point for local disagreements and local authorities saw it as incompatible with their duties under the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) regulations.

4. The concerns raised a question as to whether the Bill as drafted would meet our policy objectives for the Welsh language namely:
 - enable Welsh language immersion to continue as is
 - recognise the status of Welsh as a minority language
 - increase the perception and understanding of Welsh in English-medium schools
 - signal our direction of travel to more actively support the facilitation of bilingual citizens in line with Cymraeg 2050 – our Welsh language strategy
5. The Minister for Education stated that she would listen to concerns during the passage of the Bill in the Senedd and, in light of that, proposed to consider amending the Bill.
6. The proposed amendment would be to make English a mandatory element from age seven. This would mean it would be for schools to decide whether and how to teach English prior to that age. Welsh language immersion would continue as now without Welsh-medium schools or settings needing to make an additional decision to disapply English as a mandatory element up to the age of 7.
7. This change would also better align the new curriculum with the child development underpinnings of the current Foundation Phase and better reflects what we know about child development: that formal subjects are best introduced at age 7 as in the current Foundation Phase. This is consistent with the school-level design of curriculum reform. This will also better reflect Welsh Government policy on Welsh language and Welsh language immersion. Continuing to ensure that Welsh is taught in English-medium

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schools from the age of 3 reflects the fragility of the language. Making English mandatory from the age of 7 does not prevent schools from teaching English, and the Welsh Government would consider providing supporting non-statutory guidance for English-medium schools on English language learning if schools deemed this helpful.

Methodology

8. To obtain views on the proposed amendment an online smart survey was conducted over a period of four weeks accompanied by stakeholder sessions. Seven questions were asked and a copy of the survey has been appended to this report at Annex A.
9. To maximise responses the survey was advertised on all relevant Welsh Government social media channels, a stakeholder bulletin was issued to the Education Communications Working Group and the WLGA and there were articles in the Dysg newsletter. The link to the survey was also sent to key stakeholders as listed in Annex B.
10. In addition to the survey several stakeholder sessions were arranged for the following groups:
 - Welsh language stakeholders
 - local authority and consortia
 - Children's, Future Generations' and Welsh Language Commissioners
 - pioneer schools involved in the development of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience
 - schools and workforce unions
11. There are possible limitations of this exercise in that the four week period may mean that the responses to the survey have only have been received from individuals with internet access and the skills and motivation to reply and some responses indicated that certain questions may not have been fully understood and this may have had a small effect on the results.
12. However, this was a high profile issue at the time of this exercise and every effort was made to maximise the number of responses which were in the event comparable to consultations that have been carried out over a longer time frame.

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Survey results

Responses received

13. Around 200 responses were received and just under a quarter were anonymous. Many were individuals and a number of schools, mainly primary, and nurseries also responded as did a number of governors.
14. Among the organisational responses received were Estyn, Mudiad Meithrin, Welsh Language Commissioner, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, consortia, National Association of Day Nurseries and some local authorities. Welsh language stakeholders responded as did two educational workforce unions and two ITE centres.

Support for the proposal

15. Of those responding over two thirds (68%) were in favour of the proposed amendment. Support is possibly higher as some of those who responded that they did not support the proposal gave evidence suggesting that they in fact did support but may have misunderstood the question. For example this primary school responded that they did not support the proposal, but to support their views noted:

Schools need time to ensure that children have learnt Welsh well first. Most children's lives are through the medium of English and so there is plenty of support for the English language anyway. Most children only have Welsh in school and therefore that time needs to be protected [Translated from the original Welsh].

Evidence to support views

16. Respondents were asked for evidence to support their views as to whether they agreed with the proposed amendment or not. Those who agreed with the proposal see Welsh language immersion as the only effective way to gain fluency in Welsh. This they argue is because language learning is most

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rapid before age seven and immersion has no effect on GCSE performance in English, and English is picked up regardless because of its prevalence in our communities.

This is a second language for the majority of pupils and having Welsh as a primary focus during these significant learning years provides children with the opportunity to be fully immersed in the language. The learning of a minority language is much more successful when it is the only focus.

17. The current system is seen as working well and the proposed amendment is seen as a far better match than the disapplication process and fits better with the aims of Cymraeg 2050. The disapplication process was seen as having unintended consequences that would have led to lessening the numbers of Welsh-medium schools and, in the end, the number of speakers.

The inclusion of English as a mandated element for children aged 3 to 7 goes completely against the essence of Welsh-medium education and undermines the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium education strategy and the ambition of reaching a million speakers by 2050 [Translated from the original Welsh].

18. Nearly all organisational responses were in favour of the proposal.
19. Those against the proposal argued that English is a global language and a more important language so should be mandatory from age three.

The attainment of higher level of literacy in English is of far greater benefit to the majority of school pupils than Welsh. And whilst it may be a difficult reality to face, abilities within the English language offer far more benefits in the wider world.

20. Some were concerned that without English until age seven it would be harder for pupils to catch up, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Others argued for equality and that both languages should be taught from age three.

English should also be mandatory from aged 3. The later we leave it, the harder it will be for those from less well-to-do backgrounds to catch up.

21. The point was made in the stakeholder sessions below that the expectations on the English medium sector were higher than Welsh-medium due to having an extra language to teach.
22. Interestingly a few were against the proposal because they thought that English should not be mandatory at all in the Bill, these included some Welsh language stakeholders. Others who held similar views supported the proposal.

Effects of the proposal on the Welsh language

23. Those supporting the proposal saw it as increasing opportunities for people to speak Welsh as it enables Welsh immersion which gives a sound basis for the development of bilingualism and gives Welsh a priority at a key point in a child's linguistic development.

Receiving Welsh-only education until the age of 7 gives children a fair opportunity to acquire in the Welsh language, and to be fully bilingual – a skill that will enrich their opportunities in the world of work and opportunities in the rest of their lives [Translated from the original Welsh].

24. The change in emphasis is seen as raising the profile of Welsh and may lead to more staff using the language. Staff modelling positive behaviour towards the Welsh language may itself engender more positive attitudes in pupils, and this is especially important for those for whom Welsh is a second language.

The change of emphasis should be a good opportunity for more school staff to use Welsh in the workplace. This would raise the profile of the Welsh language among children who do not hear Welsh outside the school walls. [Translated from the original Welsh]

25. For those who supported the proposal, it is seen as allowing the current situation of Welsh immersion to continue and is a big improvement on the original drafting as it appeared to treat Welsh immersion less favourably than bilingual education, as a result of the disapplication process.

Making English mandatory from 7-years-old in the new Curriculum Bill allows us all to continue with the status quo. The success of Welsh-medium education is completely dependent on the immersion approach especially for children in pre-school age [Translated from the original Welsh].

26. Some of those against the proposal restated their opinion that English is more important or that both languages should be treated equally and start at age three with some seeing this equal treatment as positive for Welsh:

Parity would mean that there was no disadvantage to one language. The aim would be stated early that both languages are equal right from the start. It would greatly help parents who are not Welsh who could then encourage their children in Welsh.

27. A small number see treating Welsh more favourably than English as a negative and possibly divisive move.
28. Again a small number do not support English being mandatory at all because they argue that pupils will learn the language irrespective of this.

Increasing positive effects and mitigating negative effects on the Welsh language

29. Not many respondents directly answered the question but, of those that did, a few commented that the change normalises Welsh and thereby creates a precedent of positive treatment and will in itself be a positive effect.
30. Other suggestions were to remove English as a mandatory element; a Welsh language code especially to set expectations for Welsh in English-medium; training to increase staff confidence in using Welsh; more Welsh language resources; more Welsh-medium schools; and promoting Welsh in the workplace so that it become more attractive to learners.

Effects on the English language

31. As would be expected, those supporting the proposal see no effect on English due to its prevalence in the community and from the experience of Welsh immersion.

As English is a majority language (one of the most influential in the world), there is no concern about the impact of this proposal on the English language [Translated from the original Welsh].

32. Of those not supporting the proposal, the main theme was concern that it may have an effect on English language development, especially in reading and writing skills and possibly more so where less support for these was provided in the home.

This could affect lower ability pupils who would greatly benefit from as much English language skills as possible. If little reading is occurring at home. Starting serious English language skills later could negatively effect these pupils long term.

33. No respondents expressed the view that the proposal will directly affect the English language itself.

Further comments

34. Respondents were offered an opportunity to add any further comments. Most did not. Where they did so the vast majority simply restated their answers to other questions. One point made was the need to have a workforce with the requisite language skills to deliver more Welsh in the curriculum.

Feedback from the stakeholder sessions

35. Nearly all stakeholders approved the amendment and were pleased that the Minister had listened to the concerns. The point was made that pupils in

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Welsh-medium schools are all fluent in English by the end of primary irrespective of their home language and therefore this change would not affect their English language ability.

36. Although Welsh language stakeholders and the Welsh Language Commissioner are supportive, this support was qualified. They questioned the need for English to be mandatory at all as they could not see a logical need for this when compared to the other mandatory elements, English will be taught in the new curriculum regardless of it being mandatory. They also thought the Bill could have gone further to promote the Welsh language by incorporating a Welsh language code and by making the linguistic categorisation of schools statutory. There is some disappointment that the Bill does little more than maintain the status quo and see it as an opportunity lost in this respect.
37. Schools were largely supportive but made the point that it is important to communicate what this will mean in practice, especially to English medium schools and settings.
38. A small number of school and local authority stakeholders voiced concerns that Welsh-medium schools not having to teach English before age seven goes against the grain of the Curriculum for Wales in that the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience is about more than one language and also see it as divisive in that English-medium schools are again expected to be accountable for more than Welsh-medium as they have to teach Welsh in addition to English.

Conclusion

39. It is clear from the survey and stakeholder events that the responses received strongly supported the proposed amendment. This support is even stronger when those who offer qualified support, because they would prefer English not to be a mandatory element, are added.
40. Overall the proposed amendment is seen as enabling the status quo to continue and removes the potential barrier to Welsh immersion presented by the current drafting of the Bill. With Welsh immersion being a proven way to develop bilingual learners, enabling it to continue is regarded as beneficial for the Welsh language whilst having no effect on the English language.

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Annex A – content of survey

Mandatory status of English in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Introduction

We are gathering opinions about the mandatory status of English in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill ('the Bill') and the degree to which it is in accordance with child development, delivers our policy objectives to:

- enable Welsh language immersion to continue as is
- recognise the status of Welsh as a minority language
- increase the perception and understanding of Welsh in English medium schools
- signal our direction of travel to more actively support the facilitation of bilingual citizens in line with Cymraeg 2050 – our Welsh language strategy

The survey is live as of Friday 6 November, and will conclude on Friday 4 December.

The Bill is currently undergoing scrutiny by Senedd Cymru. If passed, the Act will enable the Welsh Government and partners to put in place a new curriculum for schools and funded non-maintained settings such as nurseries, as well as the associated assessment arrangements, for children and pupils aged 3 to 16.

Why are we proposing to change the Bill?

Concerns have been expressed that the Bill as it is currently drafted may not achieve our policy objectives as fully and clearly as we would wish. A number of specific concerns have been raised during Stage 1 scrutiny of the Bill in evidence sessions held by the Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPE) in Senedd Cymru, highlighting the potential consequences for Welsh language immersion of the approach being taken. At the CYPE on 21

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October, and in response to the concerns raised during the Committee evidence sessions, the Minister for Education confirmed that she would look to make English mandatory from 7 years, through an amendment at Stage 2. This would be in order to address the concerns raised in Committee evidence sessions. This consultation seeks views to enable the Minister to decide whether or not to table such an amendment.

What is the current approach to language learning in Wales?

The Foundation Phase (3 to 7 years) was based on research in child development showing that children develop more rapidly in the early years (0 to 7) than any other time. It was also based on the work of various educational theorists who argue that learning through experiences rather than formal subject knowledge is more appropriate for this age group, as children do not begin to benefit from extensive formal teaching until about the age of six or seven. In the early years children do not benefit from discrete learning but from learning that is broad in scope across rather than within traditional subject boundaries.

These sources of evidence informed the development of the Foundation Phase leading to eschewing formal subjects. The Foundation Phase Framework sets out the statutory curriculum and outcomes for 3 to 7 year old children and outlines broad 'Areas of Learning' rather than discrete subjects each containing a programme of education, or curriculum, and outcomes that support children's development and their skills. These Areas of Learning must complement each other and work together to provide a cross-curricular approach to form a practical relevant curriculum. They should not be approached in isolation. Emphasis is placed on developing children's skills across the Areas of Learning, to provide a suitable and integrated approach for young children's learning.

The Framework sets out that Welsh medium and bilingual schools and settings that support children in becoming bilingual in Welsh and English should continue to apply and develop their current language policies. They should implement and follow the educational program of the Language, Literacy and Communication Skills (LLCS) Area of Learning. This Area is organised into three 'strands' - oracy, reading and writing – and in the main makes no language differentiation, except to address issues of difference such as mutation in the Welsh language.

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In schools and settings where English is the main medium of communication, children's Welsh language skills are progressively developed throughout the Foundation Phase by implementing the Welsh Language Development (WLD) Area of Learning.

The Areas of Learning and their content – including WLD and LLCS - are mandatory in the Foundation Phase; English language development is not identified discretely as an Area of Learning but the underpinning skills for language development are embedded through LLCS.

Welsh language immersion

Welsh language immersion education is carried out in some primary schools – they are usually known as Welsh medium schools. Similarly some pre-school settings, such as Cylch Meithrin, also provide Welsh language immersion.

A school or setting using Welsh language immersion will teach wholly through the medium of Welsh until the age of 7, before then gradually introducing English. There is an expectation that Welsh medium schools teach the LLCS Area in Welsh.

Analysis of GCSE English results from the Pupil Level Annual School-level Census (PLASC) and data from Qualifications Wales show that pupils that have had a Welsh-medium education have English skills that are typically at the same level as pupils who have attended English medium schools. Welsh language immersion is an important part of the model in Cymraeg 2050.

How does the Bill as currently drafted deal with language learning?

The new curriculum is organised into six Areas of Learning and Experience:

- Creative Arts
- Health and well being
- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy

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- Science and Technology

Each school and setting will create their own curriculum within the framework set out by the Bill and associated guidance which must encompass each of these Areas.

As well as these the Bill lists four 'mandatory elements' that must be taught in each school and setting from age three to sixteen. These are:

- Welsh
- English
- Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Religion, Values and Ethics

Welsh language immersion

Each school and setting develops a curriculum within the framework set out by the Bill and associated guidance that best suits its learners and location. The Bill currently requires both English and Welsh to be taught from 3 to 16 years.

The Bill enables Welsh language immersion by giving schools and settings the ability to decide whether English is a mandatory element of their curriculum or not up to age 7 through a disapplication process by the school to maintain or improve pupils' fluency in Welsh. The equivalent is not available for Welsh language learning, which is mandatory in all schools and settings.

What are we thinking of changing in the Bill?

It is our view, based on the strength of stakeholder feedback, that the disapplication process for Welsh medium schools, instead of enabling Welsh language immersion, is actually perceived as a barrier to it. This could create a focal point for local disagreements and is seen by local authorities as incompatible with their duties under the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) regulations. Our policy intention is to enable Welsh language immersion to continue as is, and to recognise the status of Welsh as a minority language in support of Cymraeg 2050.

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Our wider policy objectives around curriculum reform emphasise the importance for schools to make their own decisions about curriculum design depending on learner and community priorities. The current philosophy of the Foundation Phase is predicated on child development research which suggests that learners between 3 and 7 years do not benefit from discrete learning but from learning that is broad in scope across rather than within traditional subject boundaries.

In line with this, our proposal is to:

Amend the Bill to make English mandatory from the age of 7. This would mean it would be for schools to decide whether and how to teach English prior to that age. Schools would be able to teach English in a way that supports progression for their learners, and the Welsh Government may provide non-statutory guidance to support schools in this if it is considered helpful. This status of English language learning would then be consistent with the current approach in the Foundation Phase.

Retain Welsh as mandatory from the age of 3. This reflects our view that it is an endangered minority language which requires additional support, as set out in Cymraeg 2050. This approach would again be consistent with the current approach in the Foundation Phase, where Welsh is mandatory in English-medium schools. However, the proposed amendment to the Bill would be a clearer signal of our expectation that Welsh language learning should be promoted and enabled by putting this expectation on the face of the Bill for all schools.

This would remove the need for schools that wish to provide Welsh language immersion to have to disapply English as a separate step (and the current provisions in the Bill in sections 26 and 27 would be removed).

Why does this make a difference?

This would better align the new curriculum with the child development underpinnings of the current Foundation Phase and enables Welsh language immersion to continue as now without Welsh-medium schools or settings needing to make an additional decision to disapply English as a mandatory

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element up to the age of 7.

This better reflects what we know about child development and that formal subjects are best introduced at age 7 as in the current Foundation Phase and is consistent with the school level curriculum design of the reforms. This will also better reflect Welsh Government policy on Welsh language and Welsh language immersion. Continuing to ensure that Welsh is taught in English medium schools from the age of 3 reflects the fragility of the language. Making English mandatory from the age of 7 does not prevent schools from teaching English, and the Welsh Government would consider providing supporting non-statutory guidance for English medium schools on English language learning if schools deemed this helpful.

What will not change?

By itself this will not increase the number of Welsh-medium schools or change schools into Welsh-medium schools. This is because changes to the language of teaching at a school will still be governed by the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. Significant changes to the language of teaching at a school are regulated by this Act and cannot simply be done by the school, local authority or the Welsh Government. To make such a change the local authority and school's governing body must bring forward a proposal which then must be consulted upon. The change we are proposing to make does not directly affect this.

It will not change the ability of English-medium schools to teach English before the age of 7 from the current situation. However, it will change the position from that currently within the Bill, where English is mandatory from the age of 3. Further to the proposed change, English will be mandatory from 7.

As Welsh is currently mandatory in Foundation Phase, the change to the Bill alone will not change the commitment of English-medium schools to teach Welsh.

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Why are there only four weeks to respond?

The Minister for Education is responding, at pace, to notable stakeholder views which have emerged since the Bill was introduced on 6 July and over the CYPE evidence sessions in the autumn. The Minister has committed to consider bringing forward a Stage 2 amendment and the timing of this consultation is in order to inform this decision.

The Welsh Government is committed to working closely with the widest possible range of stakeholders during this period in order to gain as full and extensive an understanding of people's views as possible during this time, as well as wider contextual factors for consideration. To enable stakeholders to respond as easily as possible, we have sought to limit the number of questions and make them as simple as possible. We will also take into account the public views of stakeholders as set out in the Committee's evidence in considering the response and will reflect these in our response to consultation.

To ensure everyone who wants to have their say has a chance we are publishing this on our website as normal and are also sharing it on all of our social media channels, including in our newsletters, as well as sending it to partner organisations to share more widely. We will meet some stakeholder groups and have a virtual event for English-medium schools to understand fully their needs to ensure this is implemented effectively.

Questions

1. Name/Organisation:

2. Do you agree that we should make English mandatory from age 7?

Yes/No

3. What evidence do you have to support your view?

4. We would like to know your views on the effects that this proposal would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

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i) opportunities for people to use Welsh

ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

5. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated? Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy could be formulated or changed so as to have:

i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language

ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

6. We would like to know your views on the effects that this proposal could have on the English language:

7. Do you have any other comments about this proposed change?

Annex B – list of stakeholders that directly received a link to the survey

ADEW

ASCL

Bwrdd Gwaith Ieuencid Dros Dro

Bwrdd Syr Ifanc

Cardiff Welsh Education Forum

Catholic Education Service

Children's Commissioner for Wales

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Church in Wales

CYDAG

Cymdeithas yr Iaith

Dyfodol i'r Iaith

Early Years Advisory Teachers

Early Years Wales

Education Workforce Council

Equality and Human Rights Commissioner (Commission in Wales)

Estyn

Foundation Phase leads – consortia

Foundation Phase leads – local authorities

GMB

Local Authority Governance Officers

Menter Iaith

Mudiad Meithrin

NAHT Cymru

National Day Nurseries Association

National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

NASUWT

NEU Wales

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Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years

Qualifications Wales

Regional Consortia

RhAG

Senedd Ieuenctid Cymru

SNAP Cymru

Sustainable Futures Commissioner

UCAC

UCU

UNISON

UNITE

Urdd Gobaith Cymru

VOICE

Welsh Language Commissioner

Welsh Local Government Association

Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

ITE providers

University of Wales Trinity St David's

University of South Wales

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