

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

15/2016

PUBLICATION DATE:

10 MARCH 2016

EVALUATION OF THE WELSH-MEDIUM EDUCATION STRATEGY

Final report

Executive Summary

1. Introduction and research aims

- 1.1 This is the final report of an independent three-year evaluation of the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy. The evaluation was undertaken by Arad Research on behalf of the Welsh Government.
- 1.2 The Welsh-medium Education Strategy ('the Strategy') was published by the Welsh Government in April 2010, with a commitment to support the '*continuing growth of Welsh-medium education and training in all sectors and age ranges*'. It also places an emphasis on improving planning to support Welsh-medium education, and contains five and ten-year targets to monitor progress as the Strategy is implemented.
- 1.3 The six strategic aims of the Strategy seek to strengthen planning methods and improve the infrastructure to support Welsh-medium education nationally and at a local level:

Strategic aim 1: To improve the planning of Welsh-medium provision in the pre-statutory and statutory phases of education, on the basis of proactive response to informed parental demand

Strategic aim 2: To improve the planning of Welsh-medium provision in the post-14 phases of education and training, to take account of linguistic progression and continued development of skills

Strategic aim 3: To ensure that all learners develop their Welsh-language skills to their full potential and encourage sound linguistic progression from one phase of education and training to the next

Strategic aim 4: To ensure a planned Welsh-medium education workforce that provides sufficient numbers of practitioners for all phases of education and training, with high-quality Welsh-language skills and competence in teaching methodologies

Strategic aim 5: To improve the central support mechanisms for Welsh-medium education and training

Strategic aim 6: To contribute to the acquisition and reinforcement of Welsh-language skills in families and in the community

- 1.4 The aim of the evaluation was to measure the effectiveness and impact of the Strategy, examining to what extent the Strategy has achieved its expected aims, objectives and outcomes.
- 1.5 The evaluation is based on a wide-ranging programme of research that combines a range of methods. An evaluation of the Strategy in its entirety sits alongside reviews of some of the specific programmes that form part the Strategy's action plan. Reviews have already been published on the Welsh-language Sabbatical Scheme for education practitioners, the Welsh-medium resources commissioning programme, the Bilingual Champions project in further education; and two projects relating to Welsh as a second language. An interim evaluation report on the Strategy was published in November 2014.
- 1.6 The final report sets out the context and background to the Strategy (Chapter 3). It provides information and commentary on the implementation of the Strategy (Chapter 4). Chapters 5-8 are presented according to themes which correspond to the Strategy's aims, namely: Planning provision (Chapter 5), Developing the workforce (Chapter 6), Central support (Chapter 7) and Language skills and the use of Welsh (Chapter 8). Conclusions and recommendations are set out in Chapter 9.

2. Research methods

- 2.1 The evidence and conclusions of the evaluation are based on the following research methods and reviews:
 - scoping phase and refining the evaluation framework;
 - interviews with national stakeholder organisations;
 - area studies in six areas of Wales (interviews with local authority officers, teachers, learners, local stakeholders, parents);
 - survey of school headteachers and principals of further education colleges;
 - *Review of the Use and Quality of Resources Commissioned by the Welsh Government's Welsh in Education Unit;*

- *A study of the work of the Bilingual Champions in Further Education;*
 - *Review of the Welsh-language Sabbatical Scheme for education practitioners: 2011-2012 participants' experiences;*
 - *Reviews of two projects relating to Welsh as a second language (Review of the 'Everyday Welsh' Project, and Review of a Project to encourage Welsh-medium teaching in English-medium primary schools).*
- 2.2 This report provides a holistic assessment drawing on evidence gathered during the various phases and research activities listed above.

3. Key findings

Implementation of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy

- 3.1 There is support for the Strategy's vision and aims amongst officers (at a national and local level), stakeholders and practitioners who have been involved with its delivery. However, the evidence suggests that the Strategy's vision has not been embedded consistently across all delivery partners and throughout the various layers of the education system, from Welsh Government down to local authorities and providers.
- 3.2 One of the principal reasons for this is the continuous change to the policy landscape during the period since the publication of the Strategy. There have been changes to school support arrangements (regionalisation) and key policy reviews relating to qualifications, post-16 planning and funding, curriculum and assessment and initial teacher training. The evaluation concludes that neither the Strategy's vision nor its influence has been sufficiently mainstreamed to withstand the influence of other external developments. There is a need for the Welsh Government to ensure that its vision for Welsh-medium education is supported and reinforced in the delivery of education policies, including in taking forward the recommendations of *Successful Futures*, Professor Donaldson's report on curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales.
- 3.3 There are variations in the amount of attention given to the Strategy by different delivery partners. Some local authorities and providers have worked proactively to ensure that their own strategic plans are aligned with the Strategy's vision and aims. On the other hand, a number of local authorities and providers have demonstrated a lack of strategic forward planning to support growth in Welsh-medium education. We conclude that the Welsh Government should publish a policy statement that reaffirms its vision and its commitment to developing Welsh-medium education provision.
- 3.4 The evaluation has found improvements in how local authorities and some other delivery partners plan in order to support Welsh-medium education provision. However, the steps taken to date have not led to growth on the scale intended by the Welsh Government. Evidence gathered through the evaluation shows that

planning on the basis of responding to demand, which is one of the Strategy's principles, does not necessarily ensure growth in provision.

- 3.5 In reaffirming its vision for Welsh-medium education, the Welsh Government should clearly state its expectation that delivery partners should forward plan in a purposeful way to increase provision and, where appropriate, encourage increased demand in order to realise the Welsh Government's vision for growth in Welsh-medium education. The challenge facing the Welsh Government is to ensure that partners take full ownership of its vision, and implement it decisively across all tiers of the education system in Wales.

Progress against the Strategy's targets

- 3.6 There have been some indications of success in reaching the targets that were set in 2010. However, in the case of the majority of the indicators the progress that had been envisaged in 2010 has not been achieved. Details of progress against the targets are provided in Chapter 4 of the full report.
- 3.7 We conclude that there is scope to strengthen the leadership within the Department for Education and Skills in driving forward the delivery of the Strategy. In working towards increasing provision in line with the Strategy's expected outcomes there is a need to ensure that progress is challenged by senior officials and that all delivery partners are held to account for their contribution towards the targets.

Planning provision

Planning Welsh-medium provision in the early years

- 3.8 Although this evaluation has not researched in detail local arrangements to support Welsh-medium early years provision, the evidence suggests that provision for Welsh-medium early years is not meeting demand in a number of areas. The Welsh Government's vision for Welsh-medium provision in the early years is not expressed consistently across all relevant policies, programmes and action plans. Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs), local Flying Start strategic plans and the action plans of other relevant programmes need to state clearly how this vision will be implemented and realised.

Planning Welsh-medium provision in the statutory phases

- 3.9 Placing Welsh in Education Strategic Plans on a statutory basis was an important development that has led to more consistent and structured planning arrangements. There was evidence of a more coordinated approach to planning Welsh-medium provision in the six area studies included in the evaluation. However, participants raised questions about how effective planning processes were in supporting an increase in provision. Headteachers and stakeholders in some areas reported that local authorities were 'slow' or 'reluctant' to respond to the growing demand for

Welsh-medium education.

- 3.10 The approach and level of understanding of key individuals (Directors of Education, elected members, senior officers) heavily influence the quality and effectiveness of local plans and actions to support Welsh-medium education. There is a need for local leaders to have ownership of WESPs and drive growth in provision in a way that supports the Strategy's national vision.
- 3.11 There is inconsistency in local authorities' approaches to consulting with schools, providers and local stakeholders in preparing their WESPs. There is scope to improve the way in which a number of authorities secure the input of partners to the process of drawing up their plans.
- 3.12 There were examples of a lack of connection between the objectives of the Strategy and wider plans. There needs to be better integration between the aims of the Strategy, WESPs and other relevant local policies, such as transport policies and early years plans.
- 3.13 The Welsh-medium education system continues to lose a substantial number of learners as they transfer between primary and secondary education. The data reveals that a number of learners transfer from Welsh-medium provision to study in English-medium or bilingual streams, and follow Welsh second language courses at Key Stages 3 and 4. There is a range of models of bilingual provision in schools where varying amounts of Welsh language are used in the delivery of the curriculum. This variation is an important factor in the patterns of continuity found in Wales, with the lowest rates of linguistic continuity found in areas that have the highest number of bilingual schools.
- 3.14 Local authorities and schools should ensure that they have an understanding of the reasons behind the decisions of parents and children to change their language of learning. Local education policy officers will need to consider what action can be taken to address the situation, working closely with parents and school governors.

Planning Welsh-medium 14-19 provision

- 3.15 Implementing the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 has supported the Strategy's aim of strengthening Welsh-medium provision in the 14-19 phase. The work of the 14-19 Regional Networks and the cross-border Welsh-medium fora has led to improved collaboration between providers in relation to activities to share good practice and develop the workforce in some areas.
- 3.16 Following the review of post-16 planning and funding, a new funding framework was introduced in the 2014/15 academic year, with institutions funded on the basis of programmes rather than qualifications. There will be a need to monitor how providers adapt to the new framework, with particular attention given to its influence on institutions' ability to plan for an increase in Welsh-medium provision and programmes.
- 3.17 The Bilingual Champions project has supported the process of planning Welsh-medium provision in the further education sector and has led to an increased focus on supporting the Welsh language in colleges. Although there is support for the Strategy's aims amongst principals, the action taken is not sufficiently purposeful and strategic and, as a result, very little progress has been seen in relation to

Welsh-medium provision in the FE sector during the life of the Strategy.

Welsh-medium education for learners with additional learning needs (ALN)

- 3.18 Some forward-thinking authorities have extended Welsh-medium provision for learners with ALN by establishing specialist centres. Examples were seen of authorities working at a cross-border level to strengthen provision. However, the research has identified weaknesses in the provision and there are variations in the services available, between counties and even within counties. There is a need to continue to invest in the skills and capacity of the workforce to ensure equal opportunities for Welsh-medium learners who need additional and specialist support. Headteachers report concerns that a shortage of specialists and suitable resources has a detrimental effect on learners.

The workforce

- 3.19 The aim of the Strategy was to increase the capacity and skills of the Welsh-medium workforce to ensure an adequate supply of practitioners across all phases of education and training. During the Strategy's lifetime there has been growth in the number and proportions of students completing ITT courses who are able to teach bilingually or through the medium of Welsh. However, the evidence does not suggest that the Strategy has led to fundamental changes in terms of the supply of Welsh-medium education workforce. There is a shortage of practitioners in some subjects in the Welsh-medium secondary sector, and headteachers report that they continue to experience difficulties filling some vacancies.
- 3.20 Evidence relating to practitioner supply and demand in the Welsh-medium sector is incomplete, since the methods used to collect information about the language skills of the workforce are, at present, neither comprehensive nor systematic. There have been efforts to improve the processes for collecting data on the Welsh language skills of the education workforce systematically, but these processes are not yet operational. Data shows that the number of applicants for posts in the Welsh-medium sector is significantly lower than in the English-medium sector, and that on average, the number of applications for vacancies in Welsh-medium primary and secondary schools has halved since 2010.
- 3.21 Language standards across the workforce are a cause for concern among some school and college leaders and headteachers/principals. There is a need to ensure that language standards are addressed in initial teacher training courses, and as part of continuous training in order to raise standards amongst practitioners already working in the education system.
- 3.22 The Sabbatical Scheme, which provides periods of intensive study for practitioners to enable them to develop their Welsh language skills, has led to positive outcomes for both individuals and schools. It provides an opportunity to fill gaps in language skills, and increases the confidence of a number of practitioners who have some Welsh language skills. However, mainstream training and continuous professional development arrangements are necessary in order to ensure an adequate supply of high calibre fluent practitioners to support growth in Welsh-medium provision. There is also a need to ensure that actions and associated funding to increase and support

the skills of the workforce are an integrated part of local strategic plans and also, where appropriate, at provider level.

- 3.23 The data shows that there are Welsh language skills that are not currently being used within the workforce. No evidence came to light to show that this 'extra capacity' was discussed when planning numbers. An understanding of the areas of expertise and location of qualified teachers able to teach Welsh/through the medium of Welsh, but who are not doing so, should be important information when planning numbers.

Central support

- 3.24 The implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 has led to an increase in the choice of Welsh-medium qualifications available, thereby supporting the aims of the Strategy. The evidence shows a continued demand amongst practitioners for support from the Welsh Government and awarding bodies to provide new qualifications through the medium of Welsh. Awarding bodies need to ensure they have sufficient capacity to provide qualifications bilingually, most specifically assessors and moderators who have Welsh-language skills.
- 3.25 It is essential that awarding bodies and the Welsh Government plan ahead to allow sufficient time to develop Welsh-medium resources to coincide with the launch of new qualifications. Evidence from the area studies and the Review of Resources shows that a significant proportion of practitioners feel that the time between the production of English and Welsh versions of resources continues to disadvantage practitioners who work in the Welsh-medium sector.
- 3.26 The evidence shows that the Welsh Government's Welsh in Education Unit's resources commissioning programme is the main force driving the increase in choice of Welsh-medium resources. However, the limited range of resources in a number of areas remains problematic for headteachers and practitioners. Practitioners reported shortages of electronic and interactive resources in Welsh, up-to-date Welsh-medium resources for Key Stage 3 and resources for the further education sector.

Language skills and the use of Welsh

- 3.27 There has been an increase in attainment and standards for Welsh first language and second language as subjects at Key Stages 2 and 3 during the Strategy's lifetime. Evidence from the area studies and the headteachers' survey suggests that the national emphasis on the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, PISA assessments and improving standards generally, including Welsh language attainment and standards, has been largely responsible for driving these increases, rather than the Strategy. The evaluation heard evidence that the Strategy's objectives were consistent with broader policy and inspection frameworks, but that it was not driving efforts to improve standards nor directly influencing classroom provision.

- 3.28 Evidence from the evaluation demonstrates that Welsh first language standards have improved since 2010 in Key Stages 2 and 3. Attainment data for Key Stage 4 has remained relatively constant over the same period. Generally speaking, therefore, the attainment data is positive, as reflected in the evidence from the headteachers' survey and the area studies where most practitioners felt that standards had improved in Welsh first language.
- 3.29 The evidence presents a mixed picture in relation to standards in Welsh second language. On the one hand, attainment data shows an improvement in Key Stages 3 and 4 since 2010. However, this improvement was from a low baseline. Qualitative evidence collected through the headteachers' survey and area studies expressed criticism of standards in Welsh second language. There was also considerable criticism of Welsh second language standards across the key stages in other publications during the period of the evaluation.
- 3.30 The evaluation reviewed two pilot projects delivered as part of the Strategy's implementation programme. Evidence suggests that these pilot projects have been welcomed by practitioners and learners, but the reviews do not enable us to assess the projects' impact. In addition, neither of the pilot projects has been implemented on a large enough scale to measure their contribution towards achieving the Strategy's aims.
- 3.31 Evidence suggests that the Welsh-medium education sector does not at present give learners sufficient opportunities to practise their spoken skills. The evidence shows the importance of schools in providing opportunities to use the Welsh language outside formal education, particularly in areas where there is not a high percentage of Welsh speakers. Pupils need to be offered further opportunities to practise their spoken skills in formal and informal contexts.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Based on the analysis of the evidence collected during the evaluation, the following 21 recommendations are presented to the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 1: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should publish a policy statement which confirms and reinforces its vision for the continuing growth of Welsh-medium education. This statement should emphasise the duty on all partners to plan proactively to increase Welsh-medium education provision.

Recommendation 2: for the Welsh Government

The national targets for 2020 should be reviewed, and included as part of the policy statement on Welsh-medium education. Sub-targets for outcomes at a regional level

should be included where appropriate.

Recommendation 3: for the Welsh Government

Senior leaders within Welsh Government should ensure that Welsh-medium education is considered as a core element throughout the process of planning and implementing education policies. This should include careful consideration of the likely contribution and impact of policies on the outcomes to which the Welsh Government has committed in the Strategy.

Recommendation 4: for delivery partners

Local authorities, regional consortia and education and training providers should ensure that:

- a) leaders sign up to the Strategy's vision and act in a way which is consistent with the Strategy's aims and outcomes;
- b) the Strategy's aims and outcomes are prioritised as part of their organisational strategic plans.

Recommendation 5: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should ensure that all authorities set targets for the growth of Welsh-medium early years provision, and include them in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

Recommendation 6: for the Welsh Government

A specific study should be carried out on planning Welsh-medium provision in the early years, focussing on the following issues:

- assessing to what extent local authorities plan for Welsh-medium early years provision as an integral part of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans;
- the steps that need to be taken for authorities and delivery partners to ensure clear progression pathways for families, from the pre-statutory phase to schools;
- guidelines/methods that could be used at a local level to generate demand for Welsh-medium provision in the early years;
- the variations in how authorities gather information about the demand for Welsh-medium provision as part of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessments;
- the priorities and requirements when developing the Welsh-medium early years workforce.

Recommendation 7: for local authorities

Local authorities should carry out comprehensive, open consultations when revising Welsh in Education Strategic Plans in future, in line with the provisions of the relevant Regulations.

Recommendation 8: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should publish an annual monitoring report on the progress and effectiveness of the implementation of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. This report would be an opportunity to identify which authorities have succeeded in increasing Welsh-medium provision, and to challenge authorities that have underperformed against their local targets and plans. This report could be a means of sharing good practice when implementing plans.

Recommendation 9: for local authorities

Local authorities should ensure that local decisions, policies and plans reflect the Welsh Government's vision for Welsh-medium education and that this is articulated in the content and implementation of their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and other relevant plans.

Recommendation 10: for the Welsh Government and local authorities

The Welsh Government should continue to work closely with local authorities to prioritise improving progression rates in Welsh-medium education across the key stages.

In order to support this work:

- a) policymakers and officers working at a local level should ensure they understand the reasons why parents and children decide to change medium;
- b) clear targets should be set to increase the percentage of learners who continue in Welsh-medium education up to Key Stage 4 in those areas where progression rates are lowest.

Recommendation 11: for further education institutions

Further education institutions should ensure that they have action plans which clearly set out priority areas for the development of Welsh-medium provision. The institutions' strategic plans should state how they will expand Welsh-medium provision in colleges to support growth in the sector.

Recommendation 12: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should ensure there is coherence and consistency between Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Welsh-medium provision action plans in further education institutions. Where this does not happen, the Welsh Government should propose improvements to the plans in order to support progress towards outcome 4 of the Strategy, namely 'more learners aged 16–19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh, in schools, colleges and work-based learning'.

Recommendation 13: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should consider how to measure the demand for post-16 Welsh-medium provision more systematically, looking at ways of ensuring that learners record their preferred language of study as part of a new common application process.

Recommendation 14: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should conduct a further review in relation to Welsh-medium provision for learners with additional learning needs. The review should explore examples of good practice at a local and regional level. The review should also consider the capacity of the Welsh-medium workforce in this field.

Recommendation 15: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should continue to work in partnership with the Education Workforce Council to develop a comprehensive and systematic method of assessing the supply of, and demand for, Welsh-medium practitioners within the sector. This should lead to more strategic planning for the workforce in future and support the process of increasing the supply and quality of practitioners in the Welsh-medium sector.

Recommendation 16: for the Welsh Government

In order to ensure that the Sabbatical Scheme is used in a purposeful and strategic way, the Welsh Government should encourage local authorities to identify indicators to measure the Scheme's success which support the priorities set out in their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

Recommendation 17: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should monitor the funding provided to the Welsh-medium sector as part of the new Education Improvement Grant procedures. There is a need to ensure that the level of funding allocated to consortia and local authorities for

training the Welsh-medium workforce enables them to meet the targets of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, and respond to priorities when increasing provision.

Recommendation 18: for Qualifications Wales

Qualifications Wales should co-operate with awarding bodies to ensure that learners in the Welsh-medium sector can access equal support, and that they are not disadvantaged compared to the support and resources available to learners in the English-medium sector.

Recommendation 19: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should continue to provide a commissioning programme for Welsh-medium resources and ensure that the programme provides resources in a timely manner to support the requirements of the curriculum and Welsh-medium qualifications.

Recommendation 20: for the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government should continue to encourage schools, local authorities and regional consortia to share Welsh-medium and bilingual resources. To facilitate this, the Welsh Government should continue to encourage subject practitioners to take advantage of opportunities to create online subject networks (e.g. through Hwb+).

Recommendation 21: for the Welsh Government

As part of a policy statement reinforcing the message of the Strategy, the Welsh Government should recognise the need for additional action to develop and strengthen spoken Welsh language skills in the Welsh-medium sector. This action should focus on improving skills in order to prepare learners for the workforce. Welsh Government should carry out a review of how such new opportunities should be presented in formal and informal contexts.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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ISBN: 978-1-4734-5982-3

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