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Welsh Language Strategy: statement on taking forward our proposals

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Introduction

The Welsh Assembly Government welcomes the opportunity, following consultation on the draft strategy, to confirm and adopt the vision and aims set out in *A living language: a language for living*. In line with this, the Assembly Government sets out, in this statement, specific actions for the coming year.

It is also clear from the consultation responses that further consideration needs to be given to some areas. The Assembly Government will work with partners to develop a comprehensive action plan to take this work forward.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 provides that Welsh Ministers will be required to publish an annual action plan which sets out how they will implement the Welsh language strategy.

We consulted on *A living language: a language for living*, the Welsh Assembly Government's draft strategy for the Welsh language between 13 December 2010 and 4 February 2011. The consultation generated a hugely encouraging response from around 130 organisations and individuals. We would like to thank all those who took the time to respond.

The responses to the consultation are available on our website at: <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/welshlanguage/wlsconsultation>

It is clear from the responses that there is wide-ranging support for the strategy, and a strong and continued commitment on the part of organisations and individuals to sustain the work of promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh.

There is widespread support for increasing the use of Welsh as well as building on the Government's current national action plan for a bilingual Wales, *Iaith Pawb*, to increase the numbers of Welsh speakers. Respondents also welcomed the Assembly Government's recognition of the strengths of the language, alongside its acceptance that these strengths are tempered by the fragility of many Welsh speaking communities.

The Government is encouraged to see that the vast majority of responses reflect the ambition, support and enthusiasm of so many organisations and individuals for the language. This provides us with solid foundations on which to base future action. The key challenge now will be to harness this commitment and expertise. The task of strengthening the position of the language in our communities is not one that the Government can pursue alone. It is a necessity for us to provide leadership and we can facilitate change but we will always be crucially dependent on the support and enthusiasm of others if we are to reach out to the individuals and communities on whom the future of the language will depend.

We want that sense of partnership to be a characteristic of all of our efforts to promote the language. We want to build on and strengthen the networks established by the Welsh Language Board. And we want those partnerships to lie at the heart of the work now required as we move to implement the actions set out in the strategy.

The Government is committed to working with as wide a range as possible of organisations as we build those partnerships in support of the language. The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, which became law in February, provides for the creation of a statutory Welsh Language Partnership Council. The Partnership Council will be established in due course, as the Measure is implemented. In the meantime, the Government has assembled a cross-section of stakeholders from a similarly wide variety of organisations to form an Advisory Group to assist with the task of taking the strategy forward and preparing an action plan for its delivery.

We have also recently announced the future structures for the delivery of the strategy, which will see the Assembly Government shoulder greater responsibility for the language. The Welsh Language Board's activities, upon its abolition, will be shared between the office of the Welsh Language Commissioner (including work on Welsh language standards and their enforcement) and an enhanced, delivery focused, Welsh Language Unit within the Welsh Assembly Government (including responsibility for awarding grants and supporting projects). This will ensure a better and more direct relationship between the Government and delivery partners.

As such the Government will inherit the Welsh Language Board's role as the lead language planning body in Wales. We will ensure that the Board's innovative work to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh will continue.

The Way Ahead

The responses to the consultation indicated that there is support for the aims identified in the strategy. The task we now face is to develop and implement work streams to turn our words into action – and it is clear that many of those who responded to our consultation want to contribute to that process. We think it is important that they do so. Respondents have provided us with a range of views and innovative ideas, that we need to address as we take the strategy forward.

Before we can finalise the strategy and associated action plan, we need to continue to work closely with partners. We will also work with them to develop targets and outcomes for the strategy, so that progress with its delivery can be appropriately monitored.

One of the challenges will be doing this vital work during a period of pressure on public finances. In taking the strategy forward and preparing an action plan, we will need to ensure that we can properly evaluate the impact of our investment in the language. However, given the fragile nature of many Welsh speaking communities, it is clear that promoting and facilitating the use of

Welsh is not an issue that can be put to one side until public finances improve.

The new Welsh Language Measure will be a key component in enabling us to deliver on the strategy's aims. It will also ensure that we can share with others, including Wales' local authorities, the responsibility for promoting the use of Welsh. The work to implement the Measure's provisions has started, and our first priority will be to appoint the Welsh Language Commissioner as soon as possible. The sooner the Commissioner can begin to develop Welsh language standards, the sooner we will see greater clarity and consistency for Welsh speakers with regard to the level of service they can expect to receive from a wide range of organisations. The legislative framework established by the Measure will reinforce the policy initiatives contained within our Welsh language strategy.

We will ensure that effective links are developed between the strategy and the Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy, and between the strategy and other work that respondents have cited as relevant. The strategy's implementation needs to be joined up with other activities not only to avoid duplication but in order to ensure that it gives rise to the scale of change to which we are committed.

Developing an Action Plan

The responses to the consultation on the draft strategy confirmed that there is support for many aspects of the strategy, but also showed clearly that more work needs to be done with regard to how to plan and deliver the strategy's proposals.

This section outlines how we will move forward in response to the main themes raised in the consultation. Further work will be undertaken to address the more detailed and specific comments offered by respondents through these actions and through work to develop our first action plan.

We are pleased that there is general agreement to the **vision** to see the Welsh language thriving in Wales. The majority of respondents also agreed with our desire to see:

- an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language;
- an increase in the opportunities to use Welsh, allied with initiatives aimed at raising people's confidence and fluency in the language;
- an increase in people's awareness of the value of Welsh, both as part of our national heritage and as an important skill in modern life; and
- directed initiatives throughout Wales to strengthen the Welsh language at community level.

We are content that the **aims** described in the consultation document are supported by the majority of respondents. These are:

- strengthening the position of the Welsh language in the **community**;
- encouraging and supporting the **transfer of the language** within families;
- increasing the provision of Welsh medium activities for, and the promotion of the value of Welsh amongst, **children and young people**;
- improving Welsh language **services to citizens**;
- increasing opportunities for people to use **Welsh in the workplace**; and
- strengthening the **infrastructure** for the language.

We will discuss each of these aims with our partners, including through the recently established Advisory Group on the Welsh Language Strategy, as we develop our action plan to deliver them. There will be an opportunity, as part of this process, to consider additional suggestions which have emerged through the consultation process. In moving forward with the strategy and action plan we want to ensure that we continue to develop an open and constructive dialogue with our partners. In due course, the Welsh Language Partnership Council will bring together a range of stakeholders to advise us with regard to developing and monitoring an annual action plan. We will also ensure that the action plan is debated in the National Assembly for Wales.

The rest of this document outlines how we propose to respond to some of the key issues discussed as part of our consultation.

Issues for further consideration

Strategic Aim 1: Welsh in the community

There is general support for increasing the use of Welsh in communities across Wales, including through the development of **Language Development Areas, Bilingual Towns and Cities** and **Language Resource Centres**.

Many respondents were pleased to see a recognition of the need to develop concerted and intensive language planning initiatives in an attempt to reverse language shift in areas where the Welsh language is, or was until comparatively recently, the main language of daily life, but where it is now under threat.

We need to ensure that, in developing Language Development Areas and Bilingual Towns and Cities, that the need to promote the use of Welsh in all areas of Wales is not overlooked and that resources are not diverted away from areas where the number of people who can speak Welsh is increasing, mainly as a result of the growth of Welsh-medium education.

The responses also suggest that we need to ensure that there is clarity about the aims and scope of Language Development Areas, Bilingual Towns and Cities and Language Resource Centres as well as details about roles, responsibilities and funding. Respondents were anxious to ensure that these initiatives deal effectively with the range of complex socio-economic factors which influence the use of Welsh, whilst avoiding any duplication of effort from different agents and ensuring that the best use is made of resources.

We agree with these comments and recognise that further work needs to be done to flesh out these ideas. In the meantime, the Welsh Language Board has developed a project which will see the launch of a Language Development Area in the Aman Tawe area, which will serve as a pilot study for further areas.

In addition, it will remain important for us to continue supporting work currently undertaken by the mentrau iaith, the Urdd and other organisations working to promote the use of Welsh in communities across Wales.

Our work in this area will continue to support activities underway to increase the use of Welsh in communities across Wales, but we will also need to work with our partners, including the Welsh Language Commissioner, to bring a sharper focus to this work, whilst also supporting areas of special linguistic significance.

Key action points:

- The Welsh Language Board to establish a pilot Language Development Area in Aman Tawe by April 2011 and make recommendations, by December 2011, with regard to the establishment of further Language Development Areas.
- The Welsh Language Board to explore ideas with regard to the development of Bilingual Towns and Cities during 2011.
- The Welsh Language Board to conduct, by September 2011, a mapping exercise of existing locations of organisations which play a role in promoting the use of Welsh to provide an evidence base for the creation of language resource centres – and make recommendations with regard to their establishment.
- To continue to support, by grant and other means, the work of the mentrau iaith, the Urdd and other organisations working to promote the use of Welsh in communities across Wales. Grants for 2011/12 will be administered by the Welsh Language Board. Grants for 2012/13 and beyond will be administered by the Government.
- To continue to facilitate partnership working amongst organisations working to promote the use of Welsh in communities across Wales. To be facilitated by the Welsh Language Board during 2011/12. Afterwards, to be facilitated by the Government.

- The Welsh Language Commissioner will be able, in due course, to impose standards on a wide range of organisations, including the imposition of promotion standards on local authorities, with the aim of increasing the use of Welsh within communities.

Strategic Aim 2: Transferring the language and support for families

Respondents recognised the critical importance of transferring the language from one generation to the next one. They also recognised that this is a complex and challenging area. Comments focussed on, amongst other things, whether the 0-5 age range is appropriate, given that other agencies work with different age ranges. Many respondents commented on the need to adequately reflect the influence of the local community, the extended family, intergenerational language transmission, and childcare on the use of Welsh in families.

There was a general welcome to the draft strategy's proposal to develop coordinated action in this area, including through a **Welsh Language Delivery Plan for the early years**, bringing together representatives from the health and education sectors, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, Welsh for Adults providers, S4C, the mentrau iaith an others. The issues to be considered to include building on the work of Twf, the provision of Welsh-medium childcare and Welsh for Adults support for families.

There can be little doubt that the use of Welsh in family settings is of huge significance as far as the future vitality of the language is concerned. It will be important, therefore, to continue with the work of encouraging and supporting families to speak Welsh with their children – and to work in partnership with key organisations as we do so.

Key action point:

- To establish, by June 2011, a steering group for the Welsh Language Delivery Plan for the early years, to consider:
 - Welsh-medium child care provision
 - building on the work of Twf and other projects which encourage language transmission
 - raising awareness of the benefits of language transmission within health care and other associated professions
 - Welsh for adults provision for parents.

Strategic Aim 3: Children and young people

Respondents supported the need to expand the range of social and other opportunities for children and young people to use Welsh. There was also agreement that more needs to be done to raise awareness amongst children and young people of the value of Welsh.

The draft strategy discussed **raising awareness of the value of Welsh** through the expansion of a programme of language awareness sessions delivered to school pupils by youth workers. Although this was generally supported, questions were raised by consultation respondents with regard to funding, capacity and the expertise required to undertake this activity. There was also a note of caution that the role of teachers and the curriculum should not be overlooked in this regard, and a view that expanding the provision of, and participation in, good quality social and recreational activities in Welsh would be a more effective way of raising awareness of the value of Welsh than conducting awareness sessions.

A number of respondents wanted to see more investment in the **provision of Welsh medium activities for children and young people** in the community, and sporting activities in particular, with some suggestions that local authorities need to improve their provision in this regard. There were differing views with regard to the suitability of the 9-13 age group as a suitable age range to be targeting as part of a 'branded scheme of activities', and indeed whether such a scheme would provide any real benefits in terms of participation.

The importance of **ensuring that the views of young people are sought** with regard to what Welsh medium activities would appeal to them was supported, although some respondents noted that work has already been undertaken in this regard. We are keen to avoid any duplication of effort as we move forward.

Some respondents reminded us that **other age groups** should feature in our strategy, including older people (who can, for instance, influence the use of Welsh in families and play an important role in terms of organising and participating in community activities). We will bear this in mind as we take our strategy forward.

Encouraging children and young people to use Welsh is a key part of the strategy. The opportunities available to them must appeal – and efforts must be made to ensure that they develop a positive view of the language and its relevance to their lives.

Key action points:

- The Welsh Language Board to assess, by December 2011, the effectiveness of current projects aimed at increasing awareness and participation of children and young people in Welsh medium activities and to make recommendations.
- To invite Urdd Gobaith Cymru, in consultation with other bodies, by July 2011, to advise the Government with regard to the needs and aspirations of young people with regard to Welsh medium activities.
- To build on the Welsh Language Board's project *Supporting young people's practices in schools and community settings across Wales*.

- To continue to support, by grant and other means, the work of the mentrau iaith, the Urdd and other organisations working to promote the use of Welsh by young people across Wales. Grants for 2011/12 will be administered by the Welsh Language Board. Grants for 2012/13 and beyond will be administered by the Government. The effectiveness of those organisations to be assessed, as outlined above.
- The Welsh Language Commissioner will be able, in due course, to impose standards on a wide range of organisations, including the imposition of promotion standards on local authorities, with the aim of increasing the use of Welsh by children and young people.
- To ensure that children and young people have a voice on the Welsh Language Partnership Council.

Strategic Aim 4: Delivering services to citizens

Many respondents welcomed the approval of the Welsh Language Measure, and were supportive of the intention to establish a Welsh Language Commissioner and the new regulatory framework, based on standards, as a driver to improve the provision of Welsh language services to citizens.

The Government's intention to prepare a **strategic framework to improve bilingual health and social services** was welcomed, as was our restated commitment to **mainstream the Welsh language** into our strategic policy initiatives.

We agree with the view that mainstreaming, on its own, is not sufficient and that there is a need for all policy areas to contribute to the aims of the strategy. To this end, the opportunities that the Measure will provide to place duties on Welsh Ministers, local authorities and national park authorities through the standards framework to **promote the Welsh language more widely** was seen by many as an important development.

The importance of **the role of government**, both at national and local levels, with regard to matters such as economic development, community regeneration, housing and planning was emphasised by many respondents as being of paramount importance in the efforts of ensuring the sustainability of Welsh speaking communities. The continued support to the Welsh Language-Economy Group and the commitment to revise Technical Advice Note 20 (Planning and the Welsh Language) were welcomed.

The views received regarding the **promotion of Welsh in the private and third sectors** ranged from those who felt that these sectors should be subject to legislative requirements, to those who felt that more investment is needed to assist businesses and third sector organisations to increase their use of Welsh, to those who were concerned about unreasonable demands being placed on organisations that provide services to the public sector under contract. The possibility of developing a **charter mark scheme** for organisations in the private sector received support, although some

respondents were wary of the success of a purely voluntary based-approach. It is clear that an effective monitoring system needs to be built into such a scheme.

Welsh language services need to be more readily available and of an acceptable quality, whether dealing with the public, private or third sectors.

Key action points:

- The Welsh Assembly Government to further mainstream the Welsh language into Government policy development and service delivery.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to include conditions, as appropriate, when awarding grants and contracts, with regards to the use of Welsh
- Each Director General of the Welsh Assembly Government will make arrangements to ensure that the Welsh Language Scheme is firmly embodied within their Directorates.
- Each Welsh Assembly Government directorate to report annually on how it has delivered on the strategy and how it has complied with the Government's Welsh language scheme.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to provide Welsh language awareness training for its staff.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to review and reissue Technical Advice Note 20, with a consultation to issue in March 2011.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to continue to support the work of the Language-Economy Group.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to establish the office of Welsh Language Commissioner by April 2012.
- The Welsh Language Board to conduct a review, by March 2012, of the content of existing Welsh language schemes to provide a baseline of information for the Welsh Language Commissioner, once appointed, to begin the process of developing standards under the Measure.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to introduce Welsh language standards, under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.
- Subsequently, the Welsh Language Commissioner will be able to impose Welsh language standards on a wide range of organisations.
- The Welsh Assembly Government to publish a strategic framework to strengthen Welsh language provision in health and social

services for consultation in autumn 2011, for implementation from April 2012 onwards.

- The Welsh Language Board to assess the effectiveness of voluntary Welsh language policies for the private sector, and to make recommendations with regard to a charter-mark scheme by December 2011.
- The Welsh Language Board, and subsequently the Welsh Language Commissioner, to offer guidance and support to private and third sector bodies with regard to the use of Welsh.
- To ensure that a clear lead is provided with regard to developing the ability for the third sector to offer services in Welsh, including through
 - Continuing to support the work of *Estyn Llaw*
 - Ensuring implementation of commitments made in the third sector compact
- To establish a Welsh Language Partnership Council under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 by April 2012.
- To ensure that public, private and third sector organisations have a voice on the Welsh Language Partnership Council.

Strategic Aim 5: Welsh in the workplace

Our aim of increasing the use of Welsh in the workplace was welcomed by many respondents, but it is also clear that they share our view that this will be a challenging task.

We are encouraged that many organisations are already undertaking varied and innovative activities to develop opportunities for their staff to realise the value of learning, improving and making use of Welsh language skills in the workplace. One of the most interesting ideas submitted would see organisations that already conduct much, most or all of their business in Welsh established as **centres of excellence** in order to mentor other bodies who aspire to increase their use of Welsh.

Many respondents wanted to see **tailored Welsh for Adults courses** being developed for a range of different workplace settings. The desire to do so, whilst welcome, should be balanced against the need expressed by others to maintain consistency across different workplaces and the need to take advantage of economies of scale.

Many respondents agreed that the Government has an important role to play in providing leadership in this area, and the commitment to operate, by 2016, **Welsh in the workplace action plans across all our offices** based on best practice developed in our offices in Llandudno and Aberystwyth was welcomed. Some respondents wanted clarity regarding this commitment and others wanted this to be implemented sooner.

The role that the Commissioner and the **operational standards framework** under the Welsh Language Measure could play in promoting opportunities to use Welsh in the workplace was also welcomed by some respondents.

Making Welsh more relevant in the workplace will be a key factor in determining its status and value. We are determined, therefore, to develop this aspect of the strategy, in partnership with others.

Key action points:

- To establish the Welsh in the Workplace Stakeholder Working Group by June 2011, to make initial recommendations by March 2012 with regard to.
 - Welsh for adults
 - Promoting recognition of Welsh as a skill
 - Guidance for training providers
- The Welsh Assembly Government to operate Welsh in the workplace action plans across all of its offices, based on best practice developed in its offices in Llandudno Junction and Aberystwyth.
- To publish the Welsh Assembly Government's revised Welsh language scheme in March 2011.
- The Welsh Language Commissioner will be able, in due course, to impose operational standards on a wide range of organisations.

Strategic Aim 6: Strengthening the infrastructure

Many respondents shared our aim of ensuring that the infrastructure for the language is strengthened, and provided numerous suggestions of activities and provision which they wished to see improved or expanded.

The need for the language to be seen and heard in contemporary and mainstream settings is evident. This includes ensuring that the language keeps up with the latest trends such as in **social media, e-books** and **broadcasting**, as well as developing more traditional media such as **printed books**.

A range of views were received with regard to translation, with strong views on both sides of the debate regarding the draft strategy's proposals to develop a **new regulatory and accreditation system for the translation industry**. There was also opposition to the suggestion that work should be undertaken to determine whether it would be appropriate, or possible, for members of the Welsh Association of Translators and Interpreters to offer pro bono services for community groups.

Comments were also provided which point towards areas for further development regarding **technology and the Welsh language** given the importance of ensuring that the language can be used in as many contexts as possible.

There was also a desire to recognise the role of the **language planning profession**. Many people across a wide range of sectors have an important part to play in achieving the strategy's aims. There is a need to ensure that the profession is developed and nurtured through the development of training resources, qualifications and opportunities to share best practice.

Key action points:

- The Welsh Language Board to establish, by March 2012, a body to co-ordinate activities in the field of Welsh language terminology and place names standardisation.
- To consider with the Welsh Language Board, the Association of Welsh Translators and others ensuring the standards of translators offering a Welsh/English translation service.
- To continue to support, through grant, the Association of Welsh Translators.
- To consider establishing a pilot project in partnership with a range of organisations to develop community translation schemes, building on existing good practice.
- To support the development of Welsh language broadcasting, and explore increasing the provision of Welsh language programming on commercial radio stations.
- The Welsh Language Board to develop a language and technology action plan by March 2012.
- The Welsh Books Council to undertake research by March 2012 into the reading and buying of Welsh language books.
- The Welsh Books Council to explore the potential of electronic books.
- For the Welsh Assembly Government to continue its support for Welsh language publishing, in partnership with the Welsh Books Council and others.

Next steps

We will develop our proposals for taking forward the issues discussed in our consultation document in liaison with our partners and in light of the comments we have received. Our intention is to take this strategy forward and develop an action plan in consultation with the Advisory Group. The action

plan will be a live document to be updated and reported on regularly. It will complement the Welsh-medium Education Strategy, and make the most of the opportunities presented by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure.

In the meantime, it is important that work continues to develop the proposals in the draft strategy. We have set out how we will do so in this document.