
A review of the work of the National Centre for Learning Welsh

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Introduction

This report reviews the initial work and progress of the National Centre for Learning Welsh (the National Centre) in achieving the aims set out in its strategic plan (Gyda'n Gilydd: Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg – National Centre for Learning Welsh, 2016) and based on the recommendations made in 'Raising Your Sights: review of Welsh for Adults' (Welsh Government, 2013).

The report focuses on the how the National Centre is influencing, leading and managing the developments in the Welsh for Adults sector following the recent national re-organisation of provision. It also considers the extent to which the National Centre is providing a consistent and coherent steer to how provision is planned and delivered by the 11 Welsh for Adults providers.

The report draws on questionnaires completed by the National Centre and the 11 Welsh for Adults providers and on other documentary evidence. Staff from the National Centre and from a sample of six of the 11 providers were interviewed. The sample represents a geographic spread across Wales, including rural and urban areas, and includes former regional centres and new providers.

Background

'Raising Your Sights: review of Welsh for Adults' (Welsh Government, 2013) was published in July 2013. This was the first full review of the Welsh for Adults sector since the establishment of six regional Welsh for Adults centres in 2006. The review made a series of recommendations, one of which was to establish a 'national entity' to take responsibility for providing strategic leadership to the sector. The functions of the national entity would include developing the curriculum, tutor training, research, marketing and e-learning. The report recommended reducing the number of providers. Other recommendations included increasing the provision of intensive courses, and refining Welsh for Adults data collection and the tracking of learners' progression.

The review also recommended that the national entity:

- develop and implement a comprehensive marketing and communications plan
- develop an accessible service for learners
- implement a Welsh in the workplace strategy
- promote Welsh for the family
- develop an innovative e-learning strategy
- develop a curriculum framework
- review Welsh for Adults qualifications
- develop a training strategy for tutors

In May 2015, the Welsh Government awarded the grant to establish the national entity to the University of Wales Trinity St. David (UWTSD). The grant is for a period of seven years from 2015-2022. In January 2016, UWTSD created a company limited by guarantee, 'Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Genedlaethol / The National Centre for Learning Welsh', as the national entity. Under its memorandum of association, the only member of the company is UWTSD. A chief executive and three directors were in place by February 2016. The board of directors are responsible for the constitutional and corporate aspects of the National Centre and for ensuring that its financial and risk management procedures are appropriate and robust. The National Centre has an advisory board that advises on the implementation of its strategic objectives.

An independent committee was set up by the Welsh Government to scrutinise the work of the National Centre. Its role is to advise the Welsh Government on matters such as value for money and how well the National Centre responds to Welsh Government policies.

On 1 August 2016, full responsibility for the Welsh for Adults sector was transferred to the National Centre. The National Centre restructured provision across Wales, replacing the previous six Welsh for Adults regional centres and their 20+ sub-contractors with 11 providers.

The National Centre provides funding and strategic direction for the 11 new Welsh for Adults providers. The individual providers have been awarded contracts by the Centre for a period of three years in the first instance. The Centre will receive £1,760,000 in academic year 2016-2017 to fund its activities and to invest in national developments such as curriculum, marketing, and the interactive website. The Centre also received £8,810,000 for the provision of courses, which is distributed to its providers.

In July 2016, the National Centre produced its strategic plan for 2016-2020 entitled 'Gyda'n Gilydd' (With Each Other / Together: Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg – National Centre for Learning Welsh, 2016). The outcomes and aspirations of the National Centre are set out in this document along with its five strategic aims to:

- 1) Develop an innovative programme of attractive and suitable courses for learners making full use of the latest technology
- 2) Develop innovative schemes to secure opportunities and contexts where learners can use their Welsh with confidence
- 3) Establish a network of providers to offer a service of excellence
- 4) Raise the profile of the sector and increase the numbers who start courses and continue to learn Welsh
- 5) Establish and maintain service support procedures

Main findings

- 1 The National Centre is developing its role well as a national voice for the Welsh for Adults sector. It is providing clear strategic direction for the sector and has made progress in improving and harmonising approaches to curriculum development, data collection, professional development and assessment across the sector.
- 2 The National Centre has effectively reorganised the sector, moving from six regional centres and their 20+ sub-contractors to 11 providers. Providers are responsible for Welsh for Adults' provision in their geographical areas and are accountable to the National Centre for improving provision and outcomes for Welsh adult learners.
- 3 The National Centre has clearly defined its strategic aims and objectives. It is addressing the key challenges facing the sector, including the lack of standard measures that evaluate progress made by adult Welsh learners, and the wide variation in approaches taken to the Welsh for Adults curriculum across Wales.
- 4 The National Centre has been generally successful in communicating its strategies and approaches to its new providers. Providers feel that the National Centre staff are approachable and inclusive and they know whom they can contact if they require advice. However, only a few providers are fully aware of the National Centre's governance arrangements. In a few instances, providers are reluctant to embrace fully the direction provided by the National Centre and are slow to take on board the changes it promotes.
- 5 The National Centre has established a network of committees and groups to discuss national approaches to important issues within the sector, for example opportunities for learners to use their Welsh language skills outside of formal lessons, marketing, curriculum and training. These committees are increasing consistency of approach within the sector.
- 6 The National Centre conducts formal monitoring meetings termly with each provider to discuss their performance and to identify any action needed. This process is at an early stage and at present a minority of providers are unsure of the consequences of not achieving their targets.
- 7 The National Centre is developing a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy to promote the benefits of learning Welsh and to encourage more adults to learn the language. The National Centre's evaluation of this strategy, and feedback from providers, indicates that the current marketing approach needs refining in order to reach more potential learners.
- 8 The National Centre has introduced rigorous systems to ensure that providers target a greater proportion of their funding on teaching and learning activities. Its contracts with providers stipulate that spending on activities other than teaching and learning is limited to no more than 15% of the total funding allocated. The average figure at present is 7%.

- 9 The National Centre is developing a new range of courses at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in order to achieve greater consistency in the provision for learners across Wales. The outcome levels of the new curriculum align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The National Centre consulted with providers about these changes and has responded appropriately to feedback.
- 10 The National Centre is developing a useful online assessment tool for learners. The tool will not be fully operational until the new curriculum is completed and it is unclear how the National Centre intends to use it to measure progress.
- 11 Providers currently use their own systems for listening to learners' views in order to improve their learning experiences. The National Centre is introducing a consistent approach across all providers.
- 12 The Welsh Government has allocated additional funding to the National Centre to develop courses to teach Welsh in the workplace. This re-enforces the National Centre's key role in Welsh language planning, although placing additional demands on the Centre.

Recommendations

The National Centre should:

- R1 Develop its procedures for holding the providers to account for their performance and their compliance with the national policies
- R2 Refine its marketing strategies in co-operation with providers to target more potential learners across the various communities of Wales

Providers should:

- R3 Fully implement policies and practices introduced by the National Centre
- R4 Improve their understanding of the governance arrangements and policies of the National Centre

Leadership and management – To what extent is the National Centre for Learning Welsh providing a clear strategic direction to the Welsh for Adults sector?

- 13 In the relatively short period since its creation, the National Centre has become a strong national voice for the Welsh for Adults sector. It is providing a clear strategic direction for the sector and has made progress in improving and harmonising approaches to curriculum development, data collection, professional development and assessment.
- 14 The National Centre has successfully reorganised the sector moving from six regional centres and their 20+ sub-contractors to 11 providers. Initial obstacles in this transition process have mostly been addressed. Providers are responsible for provision in their geographical areas and accountable to the National Centre for agreed targets to improve standards and provision.
- 15 The National Centre is generally communicating well the wide range of developments it is introducing in the sector. Nearly all providers are aware of the National Centre's internal structures and whom they need to contact for different matters. At this stage, only a few providers are aware of the role of the advisory board. Most providers have a clear understanding of the relevant lines of accountability between themselves, their host establishments, and the National Centre. A few providers have been slow to embrace fully the direction provided by the National Centre and to implement the changes being promoted.
- 16 The National Centre has developed a comprehensive programme to monitor providers' performance. Providers submit monitoring reports termly and meet with senior officers from the National Centre to discuss progress. The agreed targets from this academic year will be used to establish a baseline for more focused and smarter targets next year. A minority of providers are unclear as to what could happen if they fail to achieve targets, although there are explanations in provider contracts and in the Centre's operational plan. The National Centre requires each provider to submit a range of reports including an annual self-assessment report and an annual quality assurance report. Not all providers are clear about the National Centre's expectations of reporting or about the proposed national quality framework, although the framework is included within the strategic plan that providers were involved in developing. Generally, providers are continuing to use existing quality assurance procedures.
- 17 The National Centre has set up committees and task and finish groups to look at specific aspects of provision, such as curriculum and resources, informal learning and marketing. These fora provide useful opportunities for discussing matters at national and local level. All providers contribute to these fora. Although they have only been in operation for a relatively short period, the fora are an effective way of establishing an inclusive ethos to developments in the sector.

- 18 The National Centre has produced a detailed marketing and communications strategy. During September 2016, the National Centre launched a bilingual campaign on national television that highlighted reasons for learning Welsh. This campaign was supplemented by online and local campaigns to target particular groups. A minority of providers suggest that the marketing has had a direct impact on increasing registrations, although a majority of providers feel that local marketing is more effective. The National Centre has scrutinised feedback from these campaigns and is taking steps to improve the effectiveness of its national marketing.

Professional development and training

- 19 The National Centre is developing effective processes for identifying and addressing professional development needs in the sector. Providers are required to submit their own staff development action plans to the National Centre who use them to plan local and national training programmes.
- 20 The National Centre continues to offer the National Qualification for Welsh for Adults Tutors through Cardiff University. Courses are held in Cardiff and jointly by Bangor and Aberystwyth Universities in mid and north Wales. The National Qualification will be offered in its present blended-learning form during 2016-2018, before being revised and updated to take into account developments such as the new national curriculum, with the aim of offering the new qualification from 2018 onwards.

Use of resources

- 21 The funding allocated to providers is based on how they plan to implement the National Centre's aims and objectives and their progress against agreed targets. The National Centre receives useful termly financial reports from each provider, which helps them to monitor the extent to which the financial resources are spent on teaching and learning. The National Centre has introduced rigorous systems to ensure that providers target a greater proportion of funding on teaching and learning activities. Its contracts with providers stipulates that spending on activities other than teaching is limited to no more than 15% of the total funding allocated. According to the National Centre's unverified data, the average figure at present is 7%.

Provision – How is the leadership provided by the National Centre for Learning Welsh impacting on the provision for learners across Wales?

Planning provision

- 22 Since its inception, a significant amount of the National Centre's time and resources has been invested in developing its new national curriculum. At present, there is no common curriculum or set of Welsh for Adults courses taught across Wales. Welsh Joint Education Courses (WJEC) are available to meet the needs of Welsh learners at three different levels and lead to the WJEC Welsh for Adults examinations, which align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, not all providers use these courses. A range of different courses was developed over the years, many of which broadly linked to the content of the WJEC examinations and were mainly for intensive provision such as the 'Wlpan'¹ courses. Although the wide range of courses available across Wales provided choice for learners, it also led to inconsistencies in the provision and learning experiences. The National Centre is addressing this variability by developing a new range of courses at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. The outcome levels of the new curriculum align with the CEFR. The National Centre has responded appropriately to feedback received during its consultation with providers regarding the development of the entry and advanced level courses.
- 23 The National Centre has focused on helping providers to increase provision in key target areas, in particular increasing intensive provision, better progression between levels, 'Welsh for the Family', and 'Welsh in the Workplace' provision. This new targeting of provision is helping to develop a more strategic approach to increasing the numbers of Welsh learners in areas important to linguistic planning in Wales. As a consequence, a few providers have kept courses open with lower numbers to develop provision in these key target areas, for example 'intensive provision', whereas previously they would have not run such courses.
- 24 The National Centre has been allocated significant additional funding of up to £3m by the Welsh Government for 2017-2018 to provide work-based opportunities for learners to improve their Welsh language skills. The National Centre is focusing this work on recruiting in work places subject to the Welsh Language Standards. The five elements in this scheme are:
- service and information for employers to provide guidance on how to develop training for staff and ensure value for money
 - online Meet & Greet 'Croeso Cymraeg Gwaith' courses
 - intensive three month full-time language courses (35 hours a week) at all levels

¹ Wlpan is an intensive Welsh course for beginners. Basic language patterns are taught in as short a time as possible with the emphasis on the spoken language. Wlpan is the Welsh version of the Hebrew word Ulpan, meaning 'studio'. The methodology developed in Israel in order to teach Hebrew in the newly created state with the first course being held in Jerusalem in 1948. The first Wlpan course in Wales was held in 1973.

- 'Using Work Welsh' five-day residential courses at all levels
- Cymraeg Cynnar / Early Welsh Courses for early years workers

25 The above provision will target 80 employers in total and over 1,500 individuals. Despite this additional workload placing pressure on the National Centre, it is managing the tendering process and delivery of these courses effectively and within the specified timetables.

Opportunities to use Welsh outside of formal learning activities

26 The National Centre's second strategic objective is that providers ensure sufficient opportunities for their learners to use Welsh in informal situations to improve their fluency and confidence. The 11 Welsh for Adults providers are expected to provide a specified number of hours of Community Learning in Focus (CLIF), for example at least 18 hours in learning programmes of 50-190 hours duration. The National Centre recognises that CLIF provision varies between different providers and it has developed clearer guidelines on how providers should plan opportunities for learners to use Welsh outside formal classroom activities. Providers support these guidelines, although their implementation is at an early stage.

Learner voice

27 Presently, the 11 providers use their own processes for listening to learners' views in order to improve their learning experiences. These processes are underdeveloped in a few of the providers. The National Centre's operational plan has identified the need to produce a consistent national approach to learner voice, including a national survey of all Welsh for Adults learners.

Standards – How is the leadership provided by the National Centre for Learning Welsh impacting on the numbers of and standards for learners across Wales?

Enrolment and learner numbers

- 28 During recent years, there has been a downward trend in the number of adults registering on Welsh for Adults courses. In 2011-2012, there were 18,050 learners on courses throughout Wales (Welsh Government, 2013) and this figure has decreased to 14,935 in 2015-2016, although there was a small increase in 2015-2016. This included a period of reduced funding for the sector (Welsh Government, 2017). Un-validated figures for between August and December 2016 indicate that the number of learners during the 2016-2017 academic year is broadly on track to meet the National Centre's target of 16,000 learners.

Measuring learners' progress and evaluating standards

- 29 The previous six Welsh for Adults centres had different approaches to collecting and analysing data from their 20+ sub-contractors, making it difficult to compare learner outcomes across Wales. The National Centre has consulted extensively with providers and the Welsh Government over a new data management plan. The plan outlines the data fields it plans to collect across providers. An interactive website will provide a content management system that will collate and store learners' data from September 2017 onwards. All providers expressed their support for greater consistency in the way in which data is collated and used in the sector.
- 30 The National Centre is piloting an online assessment tool to assess learners' progress in reading, writing and listening and knowledge of vocabulary and language. Providers taking part in the pilot broadly welcome the scheme, despite initial technical difficulties. It is unclear at present whether or how data from such assessments will be recorded or used to measure learners' progress as suggested in Strategic Objective One of Gyda'n Gilydd, '*The system will furnish providers and the Centre with an excellent opportunity to measure the progress of learners throughout Wales.*' (Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg – National Centre for Learning Welsh, 2016, p. 8). Given the formative and non-compulsory nature of the assessments, it remains unclear how it will be possible to use such data effectively to measure progress quantitatively at a provider or national level.

Appendix 1: Welsh for Adults providers

Current Welsh for Adults providers and their geographical areas:

- Bangor University / Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (Gwynedd / Ynys Môn / Conwy)
- Coleg Cambria / 'Popeth Cymraeg' (Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham)
- Nant Gwrtheyrn (residential courses based in Llithfaen, Gwynedd)
- Aberystwyth University (Ceredigion / Powys and intensive courses in Carmarthenshire)
- Carmarthenshire County Council (Carmarthenshire-non-intensive courses only)
- Pembrokeshire County Council (Pembrokeshire)
- Swansea University (Academi Hywel Teifi) (Swansea, Neath Port Talbot)
- University of South Wales (Rhondda Cynon Taf / Merthyr Tydfil / Bridgend)
- Vale of Glamorgan Council (Vale of Glamorgan)
- Cardiff University (City and County of Cardiff)
- Coleg Gwent (counties in Gwent)

Appendix 2: Glossary

WfA	Welsh for Adults
The National Centre	The National Centre for Learning Welsh
UWTSD	University of Wales Trinity St. David
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee
CLIF	Community Learning in Focus

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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