



Workshop Summary 2 Welsh and Bilingual Education for all 26 January 2022

This session focused on the experiences of international migrants who decided to send their children to Welsh-medium schools and some of the challenges that have emerged as a result.

Parents who have migrated to Wales discussed their experiences of Welsh-medium education

The **first speaker** moved to Wales from Europe and two of her children are currently in Welsh-medium/bilingual education, however obtaining access to Welsh medium education was not easy.

When the family first moved to Wales several years ago, they did not consider Welsh-medium education for their children, partly because they were not aware of the existence of Welsh-medium schools and partly because the priority for the family, like many migrants, was to learn English. Although the health visitor had shared information about nurseries and nursery education with the parent, there was no mention of Welsh-medium provision.

After the children started in English-medium primary education and received Welsh second language lessons the parent realised that this was not enough as the children could not speak Welsh. With the younger children, she realised that the only way for them to fully learn Welsh was by attending Welsh-medium education.

The younger children are now in secondary education and speak Welsh fluently. In English-medium education no one asks if the children speak English, support is provided and six months later they are fluent.

The second parent moved to Wales from Africa and her son is now in Welsh medium nursery provision. She decided to send him to a Welsh-medium school after she became familiar with Welsh-medium education in Cylch Ti a Fi.

The parent has learnt Welsh herself during the past 5 years, she speaks Welsh with her husband but does not speak Welsh with her son because she wants him to learn her native language. Her husband speaks Welsh with the child.

She chose Welsh-medium nursery education for the child, and he will go to a Welsh-medium school because Welsh is her husband's family's language. The child can speak three languages, most often he speaks Welsh because he hears more and uses Welsh more frequently with family and at nursery school.



She feels that it is the family's responsibility to maintain her native language at home, not the school, because of their lack of understanding of the culture.

The third parent also moved to Wales from Africa and her children are in a Welsh-medium primary school. She learnt Welsh herself and when she had children of her own, she decided to send them to Welsh-medium education. It was not easy at the beginning, but with time it is easier.

In the parent's experience the children are not enthusiastic to speak Welsh with her at home, they link speaking Welsh with being in school. In lockdown access to Welsh-medium resources was important.

One of the problems the parent has faced as a Welsh learner is Welsh speakers including teachers speaking English when chatting with her rather than slowing down when chatting in Welsh for her to understand.

Other issues raised during discussion

- The discussion highlighted the need for a body to co-ordinate the provision of Welsh-medium education.
- Officers tend to encourage the teaching of English to refugees to find work and become part of the community.
- Welsh-medium education is not offered adequately to refugees. A way should be found to give confidence to give the offer. The information does not reach the families.
- There is an attitude in some situations that refugee children must have something additional to be able to access Welsh-medium education. But English-medium schools already teach English to children from an English background, they are experts in the field. Educators need to think carefully about what the expectations are when discussing with parents.
- Local authority Strategies for Welsh Education are expected to include a statement on their intentions to increase and develop Welsh-medium education in the next decade. Local Authorities have a responsibility to be moving from responding to demand to stimulating or creating the demand for Welsh language learning.
- Schools are becoming more independent from Local Authorities, and although the statutory responsibility to deliver the potential targets within the government framework is on LAs, some participants in the discussion felt that there will not really be a change due to a lack of funding to sustain services.



THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES
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- RhAG (parents for Welsh Medium Education) intends to develop sections of their website in eight other languages in addition to Welsh and English. It is important to adapt a core message for various linguistic communities.
- Immersion courses need to be provided for people moving to Wales on Visa, particularly the Hong Kong British National Overseas Visa. There is a marked difference in the information available about English-medium and Welsh-medium education. A website is being developed and information about Welsh-medium education will be included on it. There is interest in jobs where Welsh is desirable, so support needs to be developed in Cantonese
- The WSOL Welsh Adult Education Course testifies that Welsh learners have a lot of interest in using Welsh, e.g., for supporting their children's education and belonging to the community.
- Migrants do not realise that they have rights to send their children to Welsh-medium education
- Mudiad Meithrin is active in promoting transition from nursery to Welsh-medium primary education.
- Some feel that non-Welsh speaking families tend to send their children to a Welsh-medium nursery, but when choosing primary schools, choose English-medium schools because of reasons such as concerns about helping their children with the schoolwork, and concern that their children's Welsh language standard is not high enough to receive further education.
- Parents face challenges with an application process when choosing schools, e.g., direct applications to English-medium schools e.g., faith schools is possible in some cases, but there is a requirement to apply through the local authority for Welsh-medium schools.
- When choosing schools, some parents are concerned about learning English in Welsh-medium schools, despite the evidence to remove these concerns. There is concern about the standard of English from some parents - *but when they learn English* - there is not enough information available to parents about learning English within Welsh-medium schools.
- The extended families of some migrants are concerned about Welsh in comparison with English, being able to develop an English accent is important to the extended families of some migrants.
- There is interest in immersion opportunities, following on from attending English-medium primary schools to attending Welsh/bilingual secondary schools.
- In Gwynedd and Anglesey all primary schools are Welsh-medium/Bilingual so the choice is which language the children should learn first rather than which medium of education.



- Migrants can learn English and Welsh as second language. Many migrants and refugees come from multilingual countries themselves.
- English is the strongest language for many migrant children because it is the language that surrounds them most.
- A grant has been available for many years to promote English as an additional language but the grant is also available for the promotion of Welsh.
- There is a need to create an environment throughout Wales where the Welsh language is available to all.
- It is possible for migrants to learn English and Welsh as second languages while also remembering that many migrants and refugees come from multilingual countries themselves.
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