Briefing note

The position of the Welsh language in Apprenticeship programmes in Wales

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The principal aim of the Welsh Language Commissioner, an independent body established by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, is to promote and facilitate use of the Welsh language. This will entail raising awareness of the official status of the Welsh language in Wales and by imposing standards on organisations. This, in turn, will lead to the establishment of rights for Welsh speakers.

Two principles will underpin the Commissioner’s work:

- In Wales, the Welsh language should be treated no less favourably than the English language
- Persons in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of the Welsh language if they chose to do so

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The position of the Welsh language in apprenticeship programmes in Wales: summary

In 2015/16, 3.1% of work-based learning activities were categorised as bilingual - and 0.4% as Welsh-medium only.

This percentage has been stable since 2011/12.

Of 48,345 Apprenticeship programmes in 2014/15, 2,465 (around 5%) included at least one bilingual or Welsh-medium learning activity...

... 140 or 0.3% were completed in Welsh only...

... an additional 2,195 were recorded as including ‘some bilingual learning’.

Some factors influencing the situation include:

- A lack of demand and use by learners.
- A lack of assessors and teaching staff.
- A lack of qualifications and teaching materials.
- The lack of an active offer.

A lack of assessors and teaching staff.
Findings

The use of Welsh within work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships in particular is very low. It would appear that over the recent years there has been no significant increase in the number or percentage of those who learn and are assessed in Welsh and bilingually.

This means that the potential of apprenticeship programmes to support the use of Welsh and the development of a skilled bilingual workforce in Wales is not currently being realised.

The evidence shows that there is a need to take steps to address the current situation. These steps should include:

- Undertaking a specific review of the position of the Welsh language in apprenticeship programmes. This review should consider in detail:
  
  - the extent of the current provision;
  - the role and duties of the various organisations involved in offering and promoting the provision;
  - the success of the measures introduced to date to tackle the factors preventing increased use;
  - the sufficiency of the current structures to sustain growth in the future;

- Consideration should also be given also to improving the understanding of the position of the Welsh language in work-based learning and apprenticeship programmes by expanding the range of data that is currently collected and published. In this respect, the Lifelong Learning Wales Record could be expanded to include data on apprentices who study in Welsh, as well as more categories to analyse the data on the use of Welsh in work-based learning programmes in general.

In the context of the Welsh Government's vision of ensuring a million Welsh speakers by 2050, and its promise of 100,000 more apprenticeships, it is vital to ensure that as many as possible of these are delivered through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.
1. Introduction

Education and the workplace are two domains central to the prosperity of the Welsh language. Our education system is the main source of new Welsh speakers. The use of Welsh in the workplace is a way of increasing the confidence of Welsh speakers, raising the status of the language, and normalising its everyday use.\(^1\) However, it is known that a significant number of Welsh speakers lose their Welsh language skills following the end of their statutory education.\(^2\)

In view of this, work-based learning programmes such as apprenticeships are crucial to ensuring progression of opportunities to use the Welsh language from education into the workplace.

At the same time, apprentices who have Welsh language skills also benefit the economy. Apprenticeships are an important element of workforce planning strategies and therefore have the potential to help meet the demand for Welsh language skills in the workplace.
2. Apprenticeships in Wales – key facts

An apprenticeship is a type of work-based learning programme. Apprenticeships offer opportunities for learners over 16 years of age to gain new skills and qualifications while they work and earn money. There are several other types of work-based learning programmes in Wales, e.g. Traineeships. However, the majority of learners in work-based provision in Wales participate in apprenticeships (approximately 77 per cent in 2015/16 and approximately 74 per cent in 2014/15).³

Apprenticeship programmes are delivered at three levels (Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships).⁴ Individuals can work towards a wide range of vocational qualifications. Usually, apprenticeships last for two to three years. In 2015/16, 45,295 apprenticeship programmes were delivered, compared with 48,345 in 2014/15.⁵

Each apprenticeship has a framework, namely a programme of learning activities and qualifications which are required or desirable in order to complete the programme. Relevant vocational qualifications are provided by various awarding bodies.⁶ Qualifications Wales is responsible for approving and monitoring the awarding bodies in order to ensure that they comply with conditions of recognition.⁷

Anyone can develop an apprenticeship framework.⁸ However, the frameworks are usually jointly developed by Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Organizations.⁹ Furthermore, every apprenticeship framework must satisfy the basic requirements of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW).¹⁰ On the basis of these frameworks, training is delivered and administered by a network of providers who work with employers.¹¹ These providers include some further education colleges as well as other organizations. Employers are responsible for providing training and support at work, and for paying apprentices’ wages throughout the programme.

In its Programme for Government ‘Taking Wales Forward’ (2016), the Welsh Government stated its intention to support at least 100,000 apprentices over the next five years,¹² and to increase the number of young people aged 16-19 who are undertaking apprenticeships and further develop Higher Apprenticeships.¹³ In order to support this vision, it was announced in February 2017 that investment in Apprenticeships in Wales will rise from £96m to £111.5m in 2017/18.¹⁴
3. The Welsh language in apprenticeship programmes

3.1. Policy context

The Welsh Government is committed to ‘ensuring individuals are able to undertake learning and training opportunities in their chosen language’. The ‘Work-based learning (WBL) programme specification and guidance 2015 to 2019’, updated most recently in September 2017, places a requirement on WBL providers to develop a Welsh language policy and action plan. The policy should include, among other elements, arrangements for promoting the contractor’s Welsh-medium or bilingual provision ‘where appropriate’; targets for the delivery of this provision; and arrangements to ensure the availability of bilingual staff and educational resources bilingual and Welsh-medium learning.

According to ‘The Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW): Guidance’, ‘consideration should be given to the needs of Welsh-speaking apprentices and opportunities to learn through the medium of Welsh should be promoted’. The policy document ‘Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy’, published in February 2017, includes a commitment to ‘ensure opportunities to undertake an apprenticeship through the medium of Welsh or bilingually will be strengthened, ensuring all learners have the opportunity to maintain and develop their Welsh-language skills’. The new Welsh language strategy published by the Welsh Government, ‘Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers’ (2017), commits to ‘expanding further and higher education provision in Welsh and providing opportunities to pursue Welsh-language apprenticeships’. The strategy notes that post-compulsory education and training providers, including work-based learning providers, have a key role to play in sustaining learners’ Welsh language skills to meet the growing need for a bilingual workforce.

Qualifications Wales developed a ‘Regulatory Welsh-Medium and Bilingual Qualifications Policy’ in order to ensure that learners in Wales ‘have access to a range of qualifications that can be assessed through the medium of Welsh and bilingually.’ However, it should be noted that the majority of vocational qualifications in Wales are ‘designated’. This means that ‘[they] are not necessarily unique to Wales and are usually available to learners in other countries of the UK’. It is not compulsory for the awarding bodies to ensure that designated qualifications, or the assessments relevant to them, are available in Welsh.

It should be also noted that the recent review of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol recommended that ‘[t]he Welsh Government should extend the role of the Coleg to be a recognised national strategic body for developing the Welsh language across...’
the higher education, further education and work-based learning sectors'. If this recommendation is accepted, the Coleg will have a central role in increasing the use of Welsh in work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships. The review also commented on the commitment of the Welsh Government to create 100,000 more apprenticeships over the next five years: 'It is expected that a large number of the proposed apprenticeships will be in priority sectors in terms of the Welsh language. This will put increasing pressure on the work-based learning sector to support the Government's Welsh Language Strategy.'
3.2. The quality and range of data available

By and large, there is very little data available publicly on the use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes specifically, and in work-based learning in general. The data available shows the number of work-based learning activities that have been delivered through the medium of Welsh, bilingually or with an element of Welsh since 2003/04, and it is possible to analyse this data based on subject and type of qualification. There is also corresponding data on the use of Welsh within apprenticeship programmes between 2011/12 and 2014/15. This data can be analysed based on the level of the programme. The data on apprenticeships comes specifically from a freedom of information request, and is not published or updated on the Lifelong Learning Wales Record website.

Apart from the categories noted above, currently it is not possible to analyse the data on the use of the Welsh language in work-based learning activities and apprenticeships using the same categories as those available to analyse the data on post-16 education in general e.g. based on age group and the learner's domicile authority region. In addition, it is not possible to analyse the data on the Welsh language in apprenticeships based on study subject. Also, the data on some of the factors which are likely to influence the use of the Welsh language in apprenticeship programmes, such as the availability of bilingual assessors, is usually qualitative.

It must be also highlighted that the method for categorizing and recording the use of Welsh in work-based learning programmes has changed since 2014/15. Since 2014/15, the activities' language medium is defined solely by the assessment language. Also, a new category (‘some bilingual learning’) is used to record learning activities that include some elements in Welsh, but are assessed mainly or completely in English. This means that care must be taken when comparing data before and after 2014/15.
3.3. The current situation

The data available shows the following:

- The percentage of work-based learning activities conducted in Welsh or bilingually is very low. Since 2011/12, on average only 3 per cent of work-based learning activities have been categorised as bilingual; and only 0.3 per cent have been conducted in Welsh only. Last year (2015/16) 162,480 work-based learning activities were assessed. Of those, 5,045 (3.1 per cent) were assessed bilingually and 685 (0.4 per cent) in Welsh only.

- Of 5,730 Welsh-medium or bilingual work-based learning activities in 2015/16, the majority were in fields of ‘Care/Personal Development’ (1245); ‘Information Technology & Information’ (765); ‘Business/Management/Office Studies’ (670) and ‘Sciences & Mathematics’ (560). In comparison, the findings of research conducted in 2014 suggested that the highest recognition of the importance of Welsh and demand for Welsh language skills can be found in sectors such as childcare, social care, creative industries, hospitality and agrifood.

- Since 2014/15 the record includes learning activities that include ‘some bilingual learning’. In 2015/16, there was some element of Welsh in 8,085 work-based learning activities – that is 5 per cent of all activities.

- The data relating to apprenticeships specifically paints a similar picture. Between 2011/12 and 2014/15 nearly 96 per cent of apprenticeships were completed in English only on average. In 2014/15, of 48,345 apprenticeship programmes delivered, around 5 per cent or 2,465 included at least one bilingual or Welsh-medium learning activity. Again, only 0.3 per cent or 140 of the programmes were completed in Welsh only.

- Of 2,465 apprenticeships in 2014/15 which included at least one bilingual or Welsh-medium learning activity, 220 were Higher Apprenticeships.

- In 2014/15 2,195 additional apprenticeship programmes were recorded as including ‘some bilingual learning’, 325 of which were Higher Apprenticeships.
3.4. Factors influencing the use of the Welsh language in apprenticeship programmes

There is some evidence as to what factors are responsible for the current situation and are likely to hamper future progress, although this evidence remains patchy. These factors include:

- **A lack of an active offer.** In 2013, Estyn noted that ‘many providers do not analyse learners’ Welsh language needs well enough and not all providers encourage Welsh-speaking learners to undertake training and assessment in Welsh’. According to the findings of the *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales Survey* 2015, 18 per cent of apprentices were offered the opportunity to learn in Welsh only, and 51 per cent were offered the opportunity to learn bilingually.

- **A lack of demand and use by learners.** Employer and providers believe that the low demand for Welsh-medium and bilingual apprenticeships is one of the main factors at the heart of the current situation. According to the *Post-16 Learner Voice Wales Survey* in 2014 and 2015:

  “When asked, only one in ten learners said they would prefer to learn in Welsh or in a mixture of both Welsh and English”

Estyn has consistently noted that very few learners choose to write their assessments in Welsh. It is likely that the low demand from learners stems to a degree from a lack of confidence in their linguistic skills; and from the belief that the Welsh language is not an asset in the workplace and from the lack of an active offer in the first place.

- **A lack of assessors and teaching staff.** According to Estyn’s annual reports for 2014/15 and 2015/16 the opportunities for learners to be assessed in Welsh have increased compared to the provision in the past. However, the report *Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-14: Apprenticeships-Revised* noted that many providers have insufficient numbers of bilingual assessors. In a more recent report, Estyn noted that there is a shortage of ‘external verifiers in occupational subjects who are able to discharge their duties through the medium of Welsh’; and that in some cases, the examining boards’ policies are affecting the ability of the learners to sit examinations through the medium of Welsh. More generally, Estyn judged that:
“… a shortage of Welsh-speaking staff continues to be a significant obstacle to expanding Welsh-medium provision in the majority of colleges.”

One has to remember that these comments refer to the situation in further education colleges. There is no data on the extent of this problem at other, non-college based, work-based learning providers.

A lack of qualifications and teaching materials. As noted above, it is not compulsory for the awarding bodies to ensure that designated qualifications – which comprise the majority of vocational qualifications in Wales - are available in Welsh. The lack of Welsh-medium qualifications is a recognized problem in post-16 sector in its entirety. Additionally, according to Estyn, ‘[i]n general, there are not enough national materials available to ensure that learners are able to obtain a range of good quality Welsh-medium resources in their occupational areas’ and that there is ‘[a] shortage of textbooks in Welsh.’ Again, we don't know exactly what challenges are faced in this respect by other, non-college based, work-based learning providers.
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3 StatsWales, Lifelong Learning Wales Record, *Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Learning programme numbers by programme type and provision type* [updated March 2017].
4 These levels are equivalent to an NVQ Level 2, NVQ Level 3 and NVQ Level 4, Foundation Degree or Honours Degree [https://www.careerswales.com/en/article/5000132](https://www.careerswales.com/en/article/5000132)
5 StatsWales, Lifelong Learning Wales Record, *Learning programmes for Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships* [updated March 2017]
6 Agored Cymru is the only vocational qualifications awarding body based in Wales.
7 In order to offer regulated qualifications in Wales an awarding body must be recognised by Qualifications Wales.
8 Apprenticehip Frameworks Online.
11 The recent list of the providers is available [here](https://www.careerswales.com/en/article/5000132).
13 Welsh Government, *Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy* (February 2017).
14 Welsh Government, *Written Statement - Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy* (7 February 2017)
20 Qualifications Wales, *Approved and Designated Qualifications*.
23 StatsWales, Lifelong Learning Wales Record, *Learning activities by qualification type and language* [updated 30 March 2017].
24 Not taking into account the activities for which the study subject was not recorded.
38 Estyn, *Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching and learning in further education* (June 2017), p. 15.