

# The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Welsh language

December 2020

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee is looking at the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the areas within its remit. Between 24 September and 20 October the Committee received written evidence and heard from organisations teaching and promoting the Welsh language at national and community level.

We are grateful to all those who contributed to this inquiry, the organisations and individuals are listed in the Annexe to this report.

This short report summarises the evidence on the impact of the pandemic on the Welsh language.

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should ensure that short term reallocations of Welsh Language funding, due to the pandemic, do not result in longer term funding allocations which could detract from achieving the aims of Cymraeg 2050. The Welsh Government should reinstate the budget allocations for supporting and promoting the Welsh language in full, as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should ensure that jobs that support and promote the Welsh language across Wales are central to its economic recovery plan.

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should review and update its Cymraeg 2050 action plan and the Welsh language technology action plan to reflect the rapid change to online Welsh language learning, activities and cultural events that has facilitated its use at home and grown interest in the language abroad.



**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should make training available for organisations and individuals to ensure they make the most of online opportunities to promote the use of Welsh and support their members.

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should update its Digital Strategy to reflect the greater need for fast, reliable internet service across Wales in light of the increased reliance on digital content following the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Recommendation 6.** The next Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy action plan should take full account of the changes in learning opportunities now available. It will need to consider the ways in which online learning and in-person lessons can be blended to best suit learners, and the level of funding needed to ensure that the growth in online learning can be sustained.

## The economic impact of cancelling cultural events

1. The Committee heard from organisations responsible for holding live events, such as festivals, which have been cancelled due to the pandemic. The negative economic impact of cancelling these cultural events affects the local area as well as the organisation. For instance, independent research has shown that the week-long National Eisteddfod festival has an economic benefit of between £6 and £8 million locally.<sup>1</sup> Betsan Moses, National Eisteddfod, told the Committee:

‘We did have contracts worth £1.9 million out at the time, and we had to negotiate with suppliers in order to shift those.’<sup>2</sup> And ‘2,000 jobs are partly reliant or totally reliant on the Eisteddfod for their income, so that disappeared.’<sup>3</sup>

2. She also cautioned that there are many suppliers who only work on annual events and will have lost all of their income overnight.<sup>4</sup> She went on to say ‘It will certainly take until 2022 until we start to get out of this’.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/national-eisteddfod-task-and-finish-group-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 39

<sup>3</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 40

<sup>4</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 42

<sup>5</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 43

3. Likewise, an independent assessment of the direct national economic value of the Urdd Gobaith Cymru ('the Urdd') was £8.6m in 2017/18, with the Urdd residential centres producing an economic impact of £6.9m in 2018.<sup>6</sup> Siân Lewis, Urdd, said:

'we have lost £14 million in income, and we're anticipating that over the next two years, and we're going to be in debt of £3.5 million. That, naturally, has had a huge impact on our workforce, which has led to the loss of half of our workforce of 320 staff... we see that our losses may increase to £18 million over the next few years, and as young people won't be able to attend our residential centres'<sup>7</sup>.

4. Helgard Krause, Books Council of Wales, said:

Just to give you an example of the impact of the loss of the Eisteddfod –the three major books... of the Eisteddfod, account for around £100,000 in sales annually... And, of course, you can never make that up; it's been lost, it's gone forever, and this gap remains. For some small presses and publishers who can only publish three, four maybe five books per year, this can be half of their income in any given year.'<sup>8</sup>

5. She went on to say that the effect of the loss of income was ongoing and 'I can't see us coming out any time before 2022, and that's at the earliest'.<sup>9</sup>

6. Tegwen Morris, Merched y Wawr said 'our income has virtually disappeared overnight'.<sup>10</sup> She said:

the events that we usually stage, such as our major raffle or the residential weekend, which usually bring around £10,000 into the organisation, not one of those has been held. So, clearly, we are having to look at using our reserves in order to ensure that the organisation

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[https://www.urdd.cymru/files/7715/4219/7589/Asesiad\\_Effaith\\_Economaidd\\_yr\\_Urdd\\_09.11.18\\_English.pdf](https://www.urdd.cymru/files/7715/4219/7589/Asesiad_Effaith_Economaidd_yr_Urdd_09.11.18_English.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p16

<sup>8</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p48

<sup>9</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p48

<sup>10</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p199

can survive for the next 12 months, and then we will face a very difficult economic situation in two years' time'.<sup>11</sup>

## Welsh Government response

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**7.** The Minister for International Affairs and the Welsh Language, Eluned Morgan MS, wrote to the Committee on 14 July in response to questions on the First Supplementary Budget 2020-21. She wrote:

'To support the Welsh economy and public services to respond swiftly to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, it was necessary to reprioritise budgets supporting the Welsh language. Whilst this has been challenging in the short term, we have worked closely with our partners during this time to maximise the digital opportunities and direct funding to organisations with immediate needs. Consequently, within my portfolio there was a reduction of £1.995m to the Welsh Language budget and reprioritised funding of £0.8m allocated to our iconic national events within the Events Wales budget.'<sup>12</sup>

**8.** The Minister said that the Welsh Government had given the Urdd £3.1m. She told the Committee:

'That's given them an opportunity not just to complete the work of rebuilding their residential centres in Llangrannog and Glan-llyn, but has also given them an opportunity to start the work on Pentre Ifan, and, of course, that has assisted in supporting 180 posts'.<sup>13</sup>

**9.** The Minister also said 'there was a time when it appeared that the National Eisteddfod would find it very difficult to survive, and if the Government hadn't stepped in, there would have been no National Eisteddfod in the future... we do have to prioritise certain things, and this is something that we considered to be a priority.'<sup>14</sup>

**10.** The Minister said that the Welsh language is given full consideration as Wales emerges from the pandemic:

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<sup>11</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p183

<sup>12</sup> Correspondence with Welsh Government

<sup>13</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p30

<sup>14</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p32

'So, I've established a round-table to develop the economy, and I do invite people from local government and leaders of local government, indeed from the Welsh speaking heartlands, in order to come together to discuss how we can build the economy, because that link between the economy and the language is so crucially important to me'.<sup>15</sup>

## The impact of the pandemic on the workforce

**11.** The loss of revenue and cancellation of events has had an enormous impact on those employed by the organisations promoting the Welsh language and the businesses they use.

**12.** The Committee heard that the Urdd have three quarters of their staff on furlough. By the end of October they will have lost some 150 staff members, and that when they return, their staff numbers will have halved. Siân Lewis said that the reduction would have been far worse without the UK Government furlough scheme.<sup>16</sup>

**13.** Lowri Jones said that 200 of the 300 staff across the Mentrau Iaith had been on furlough. A high percentage of those people returned to work in September when schools reopened because they work in childcare. A particular challenge for the Mentrau is that they are reliant on schools and businesses being open in order to stay viable. If there are further closures then they may have to consider redundancies<sup>17</sup>. She went on to say:

'the period after October will be very difficult if the furlough programme comes to an end as expected, in terms of maintaining those necessary services for parents, through the medium of Welsh, who are seeking to return to the workplace or are combining working from home with childcare. And, of course, the great value is that those jobs are Welsh-medium jobs within particular sectors, and that we do want to see Welsh-medium workplaces increasing rather than disappearing'.<sup>18</sup>

**14.** Helgard Krause, Books Council of Wales, also said that the furlough scheme had been a 'huge assistance'<sup>19</sup> and that about half of their 45 staff had been

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<sup>15</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p21

<sup>16</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 115

<sup>17</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 120

<sup>18</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 121

<sup>19</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 123

furloughed and that there are concerns about what happens when the scheme comes to an end. She said she was concerned about the possible impact of job losses on Aberystwyth and Ceredigion as the Books Council is one of the only organisations run wholly through the medium of Welsh and it is a major employer. Staff have been asked if they want to cut their hours or retire early. She said ‘we do certainly have to face up to the fact that we won't return to what we've had in the past, and this is hugely challenging, of course’.<sup>20</sup>

**15.** Aled Roberts, the Welsh Language Commissioner was asked about the impact of potential redundancies. He called for the Welsh Government to consider the impact on the Welsh language of all their interventions. For instance, the Welsh Government support for freelance workers should have acknowledged that there are many more freelancers working within the Welsh language cultural sector than the non-Welsh language sector.<sup>21</sup> He called for better signposting of available funding for Welsh language organisations. Dyfan Sion, from the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner, said:

‘the important thing now is that the Welsh language should be at the heart of the Government's plans in terms of recovery as we move out of this crisis’.<sup>22</sup>

### Welsh Government response

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**16.** The Minister agreed that there is a particular case for support for Welsh language organisations in order for them to retain their workforce. She said:

‘I think there is a strong case and, of course, the last thing that we want to see is that talent should be lost from the sector...

But what is difficult, of course, is that there are so many other sectors who may be in the same situation. So, you could perhaps make the same case in terms of someone working in the arts who has particular skills and talents where those skills might also be lost. So, that's the problem—that there are so many people in a similar situation. We will be making the case, as will every other department, I'm sure, as to why we should retain our talent and safeguard that talent for the future.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p 125

<sup>21</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p 57

<sup>22</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p 57

<sup>23</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p51

## **Our view on the economic impact of the pandemic**

All of the organisations the Committee heard from had experienced a significant loss of income as a result of the pandemic. These bodies rely on holding regular activities in the community, along with regional and national events to generate income and more importantly to support and promote Welsh language and culture. There was consensus that the situation will have a long term impact on their ability to deliver their core functions, but that the short term impact was unlikely to be resolved much before 2022.

The economic benefits of many of the cultural activities go further than just the revenue streams of the organisations involved. These events support local shops, cafes, tourist attractions and accommodation. The move to online events cannot support the stall holders, artists and hoteliers reliant on the income from annual festivals.

The organisations we spoke to emphasised the speed and size of their loss of revenue and membership fees. There was uncertainty and concern about the future outlook. That is, without a clear timescale for when they are able to hold in-person events, they cannot make any meaningful plans for the future.

The Committee is calling for the Welsh Government to review their existing funding allocations to the national organisations which have suffered a sudden and severe loss of income to ensure they are viable going into 2021. Short term reprioritisations of funding, for instance, at the National Centre for Learning Welsh, should be regularly reviewed with a view to restoring funding allocations in full once the pandemic is over.

## **Support for the workforce**

Many of those working for organisations and societies that promote and support the use of the language have benefitted from the UK Government's furlough scheme. Throughout our inquiry into the effect of the pandemic on areas within our remit, we have consistently recommended that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is maintained. Businesses and charities will take many months until they are able to return to pre-lockdown activities, therefore the support they receive for their employees should reflect this. The Committee welcomes the continuation of the scheme until March 2021.

Without this support, skilled workers may be lost from the sector for good, and when organisations return to ‘normal’ they will find those vacancies extremely hard to fill.

There is a particular vulnerability for jobs in this sector. These are Welsh-medium, skilled, professional jobs often based outside urban centres such as Cardiff. In order to support Welsh-speaking heartlands, it is vital that we do not allow this pandemic to contribute to the outward migration of Welsh speakers from these areas. Providing opportunities for Welsh speakers to retain and find suitable employment within their communities should be considered a priority. Failure to protect these jobs could seriously undermine the aims of Cymraeg 2050 and the target for a million Welsh speakers by 2050. For this reason we are recommending the Welsh Government should ensure that jobs that support and promote the Welsh language are central to its economic recovery plan.

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should ensure that short term reallocations of Welsh language funding, due to the pandemic, do not result in longer term funding allocations which could detract from achieving the aims of Cymraeg 2050. The Welsh Government should reinstate the budget allocations for supporting and promoting the Welsh language in full, as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should ensure that jobs that support and promote the Welsh language across Wales are central to its economic recovery plan.

## The increase in digital provision as a result of the lockdown

**17.** The Committee heard that the lockdown forced organisations to engage with members digitally, which, although challenging, has enabled them to reach a wider audience.

**18.** Once the lockdown was announced, organisations showed a high degree of innovation and flexibility by moving their activity online. For example, the Urdd hosted Eisteddfod T, which was a mix of competition and performances from the homes and gardens of competitors and artists. It featured 7,000 competitors over 27 broadcast hours on S4C and Radio Cymru.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Urdd Gobaith Cymru written evidence



**19.** Tafwyl hosted a festival from Cardiff Castle which had a global audience, with more than 8,000 tuning in through the various platforms, including AM, Youtube and Facebook. An evaluation of the 2020 digital festival notes that:

‘During a worrying time for the arts, artists, and the event industry alike, the festival provided essential cultural output and industry support at a time when it was most needed.’<sup>25</sup>

**20.** The Royal Welsh also went online, with a mix of archive, live and pre-recorded workshops and activities.<sup>26</sup>

**21.** Merched y Wawr continued to produce a hard copy of their magazine, ‘Y Wawr’, and produced podcasts based on its content with over 10,000 accessed in the first six weeks. They are now working to offer basic training to members who want to develop their digital communication skills.<sup>27</sup>

**22.** Similarly, the National Eisteddfod also used online platforms to host the festival under the AmGen banner. This included a mix of live Zoom panel discussions, prerecorded lectures, workshops, music and art. AmGen attracted an international audience with over 360,000 views on YouTube.<sup>28</sup>

**23.** The National Eisteddfod wrote that the increase in digital content available on YouTube may have solved existing problems. For instance, audiences’ can now watch events scheduled at the same time. Betsan Moses said that in future the need to consider a digital offer to appeal to broader audiences will be addressed. She wrote:

Overnight, we had to change from being a face-to-face organisation to being a fully web-based and technology-based organisation. A few weeks after the launch of AmGen, the response was clear that we have to offer more digital services in the future.<sup>29</sup>

**24.** Similarly, Siân Lewis, Urdd, said: ‘it has opened the door for us to think differently and to ensure that we do reach new audiences’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://tafwyl.org/tafwyl-digidol-2020-evaluation/>

<sup>26</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p186

<sup>27</sup> Merched y Wawr written evidence

<sup>28</sup> The National Eisteddfod written evidence

<sup>29</sup> The National Eisteddfod written evidence

<sup>30</sup> Urdd written evidence

## Drawbacks of online only provision

**25.** All of those who gave evidence told the Committee that problems with internet connectivity has prevented some audiences from taking full advantage of the digital output and online activities provided.

**26.** For instance, audiences for the Eisteddfod had trouble accessing content due to connection problems. Betsan Moses wrote:

‘Digital poverty still exists in Wales. Not everyone has access to broadband of an acceptable standard, and not everyone has devices on which online programmes may be watched. The problem of digital poverty worries us, as poor internet or strong broadband connection often occurs in rural areas, and traditionally that’s where many natural and passionate supporters of the Eisteddfod live.’<sup>31</sup>

**27.** Mentrau Iaith, Young Farmers’ Club and Cymdeithas yr Iaith also commented on the need for reliable internet connections, especially in rural areas of Wales where there is a high density of Welsh speakers. Caryl Haf, Young Farmers’ Club, said:

‘Many of our farmers and many of our members live in areas where there is no fibre provision, and the broadband speeds—well, I think I could walk more quickly than the broadband speeds in certain areas, and that is a barrier to our members in terms of participating in meetings.’<sup>32</sup>

**28.** Investment in the infrastructure to deliver more reliable access to the internet was called for. Merched y Wawr called for ‘more effective internet investment across Wales.’<sup>33</sup> Books Council Wales also highlighted the need for better access in rural areas, writing:

‘the quality of the broadband varies depending on location, especially in more remote rural locations. A complete roll out of superfast fibre broadband across Wales would be hugely beneficial to the sector we

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<sup>31</sup> Eisteddfod written evidence

<sup>32</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p230

<sup>33</sup> Merched y Wawr written evidence

represent as many businesses and suppliers to the sector are based in rural areas'.<sup>34</sup>

## The importance of in-person events

**29.** The majority of organisations which had moved to digital provision during the pandemic were intending to focus on holding their 'traditional in-person' events in future, as well as building their new online audiences and content.

**30.** The National Eisteddfod was clear that its event will always be a face-to-face coming together to celebrate Welsh culture. However, it wants to capitalise on the international audience and the ability for people to enjoy all activities at the Eisteddfod at their convenience.<sup>35</sup>

**31.** Mentrau Iaith also emphasised the importance of their face-to-face activity:

'Maintaining activity in the community is vitally important and beneficial to individuals, the economy and the community as a whole. The recent health crisis has proved how successful online events and activities can be and it is anticipated that investment in digital technology will be needed'.<sup>36</sup>

**32.** Merched y Wawr cautioned that as they increase their activity on social media, 'we need to be careful that we do not exclude older and vulnerable members, as well as those who cannot afford the latest technology'.<sup>37</sup>

**33.** Caryl Haf, Young Farmers' Club, said that the cancellation of in-person events resulted in more than an economic loss. She said:

'it's also about ensuring that everyone's okay within their community, that everyone can come together and everyone has an opportunity to socialise and that everyone can communicate'.<sup>38</sup>

and

'We will have a virtual eisteddfod but... virtual events aren't perhaps as positive as face-to-face events. People can hide behind their cameras

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<sup>34</sup> Books Council Wales written evidence

<sup>35</sup> The National Eisteddfod written evidence

<sup>36</sup> Mentrau Iaith written evidence

<sup>37</sup> Merched y Wawr written evidence

<sup>38</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p175

and perhaps aren't as willing to express their views or to contribute through the medium of Welsh over the internet.'<sup>39</sup>

**34.** Aled Roberts, the Welsh Language Commissioner also highlighted the importance of in-person activities, he said:

'there is a risk that some people are being excluded digitally and that we don't create a situation where we automatically turn to providing everything digitally. It is important that we do maintain face-to-face provision too, which is important not only from a language perspective, but also from a mental health and social perspective too'.<sup>40</sup>

### Need for skills and technology

**35.** Contributors identified a need for training in the skills needed to successfully exploit online opportunities. For instance, Mentrau Iaith wrote:

'As organisations adapt to online work, being able to access various digital skills training, including basic and advanced skills, through the medium of Welsh would have been very beneficial.'<sup>41</sup>

**36.** In order to make the most of providing digital access to festival, the National Eisteddfod is calling for more funding and expertise:

'There would certainly be additional costs to the Eisteddfod in addition to organising and running the festival itself, as we would have to ensure that we had a team of technical experts and editors working with us.'<sup>42</sup>

**37.** Some organisations have started to provide the necessary training for staff. For instance, following the success of its Facebook pages and podcasts, Merched y Wawr is now 'working with various partners to offer basic training to members who want to develop their digital communication skills. These include Adult Learning Wales and Digital Communities Wales'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p154

<sup>40</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p52

<sup>41</sup> Mentrau Iaith written evidence

<sup>42</sup> Eisteddfod written evidence

<sup>43</sup> Merched y Wawr written evidence

**38.** Bethan Ruth Roberts, Cymdeithas yr Iaith, said that her organisation would like to invest in design and communication equipment. She explained the importance of engaging with people online:

The influence of platforms like YouTube has a huge impact on language usage among young people, and our members... have noticed this impact, because, very often, there is no free-of-charge content produced through the medium of Welsh...

So, we believe that up to £9 million should be spent on establishing and maintaining a Welsh language digital initiative, with the aim of providing opportunities to see, hear and use the Welsh language digitally across platforms.<sup>44</sup>

### Welsh Government response

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**39.** The Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language applauded the work done by the sector in switching their activities online. She said ‘people have stepped into the breach during this period, and it's also provided opportunities for the Welsh language to shine in that context.’<sup>45</sup> She told the Committee that the next Cymraeg 2050 Action Plan will be updated accordingly:

‘I think it's made us all respond differently. I think we've recognised we're going to have to do a lot more digitally. I think that that is definitely a shift; we need to understand that, if we're going to shift to a more digital form of communication, we need to make sure that the facilities exist—technical facilities exist—to ensure that that is possible and it's easy for people.’<sup>46</sup>

**40.** Responding to a question on the need to narrow the digital divide, she said:

‘I think you're entirely right, and the fact that we as a Government have pumped so many millions of pounds into ensuring that broadband is available for more people, although it's not our duty as a Government to do that, it's a UK Government responsibility, but we do think it's so very important that we have provided a great deal of funding—millions upon millions—in order to ensure that broadband is more widely

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<sup>44</sup> CWLC Committee 24 September 2020, p235

<sup>45</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p10

<sup>46</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p90

available. There are still notspots, as you say, but it is important that we continue to push that forward.’<sup>47</sup>

**41.** In response to the need to ensure people have skills to take advantage of digital provision, the Minister said that one of the things she is particularly concerned about is the opportunity for older people to gain the necessary skills. She said that it is a difficult issue to address during the pandemic but will have to be considered once it is over.<sup>48</sup>

**42.** Responding to the need for resources to support digital learning, the Minister said that £3.1m has been provided for educational resources for children to use in Welsh. She noted that the National Centre for Learning Welsh has developed a partnership with Say Something Welsh which offers opportunities to share digital resources.<sup>49</sup>

**43.** Responding to a question on the reduced opportunities for people to speak Welsh socially in areas where the language is not-widely spoken due to the cancellation of cultural events, she said:

‘We did ensure that children and their parents were aware that there were opportunities for them to listen to Welsh online. If you look at S4C, there are thousands of additional people who have been viewing the channel digitally.’<sup>50</sup>

### **Our View on the move to online provision**

The Committee heard that the lockdown has forced organisations that support and promote the Welsh language and culture in the community to shift their activities online almost overnight. We would like to applaud all the organisations involved in this inquiry for their agility in adapting to the sudden change in circumstances. There is no doubt that the move online has enabled Welsh language learners, Welsh speaking communities and members of clubs and societies to continue to meet during a difficult time when they otherwise might have felt isolated.

Greater online provision has meant a wider geographical reach. We heard of people all over the world engaging in Facebook groups, tuning into the Urdd

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<sup>47</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p80

<sup>48</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p82

<sup>49</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p57

<sup>50</sup> CWLC Committee 8 October 2020, p41

Eisteddfod and the National Eisteddfod. It is crucial that we build on this success and maintain the platforms and content to continue to attract and grow our national and international audiences.

However, this move to online activity comes at the risk of excluding some older and vulnerable Welsh speakers. It could also exclude many rural communities where broadband service is insufficient for the need, as well as areas of Wales where opportunities to interact with the language is limited and often dependent on face-to-face activities.

The growth in online provision cannot wholly replace the in-person language lessons, festivals, events and weekly meetings which sustain our Welsh speaking communities. Many members are waiting for the chance to come together again and celebrate our culture on the stage or socialise in a village hall once more. Given that the need for face-to-face learning and social activities is the main function of the organisations we heard from, it is clear that online provision will be an addition to, not instead of, in-person activity.

Maintaining both will require more funding, and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. We are urging the Welsh Government not to reduce core funding to this sector because of a perceived 'shift' to online activity. The need for additional training and resources to effectively meet the challenge of online provision will require a short term increase in funding.

One of the greatest threats to the successful delivery of digital learning is the unreliability of internet provision. This affects not only the Welsh language, but all economic activity. Rural communities are the most at risk of digital exclusion. We are calling on the Welsh Government to place greater emphasis on the link between digital infrastructure in all parts of Wales and the successful delivery of the aims of Cymraeg 2050.

The Cymraeg 2050 strategy refers to putting Welsh at the heart of innovation in digital technology, but the infrastructure to enable access to digital platforms has to be available and reliable in the first instance. This needs to be reflected in the next five-year Cymraeg 2050 Action Plan.

We are calling on the Welsh Government, working with S4C, to address the need for training in digital provision of Welsh learning and social activities. This training should be available to charitable organisations, national organisations and individuals wishing to promote the Welsh language and culture. Building on the success of reaching international audiences with Welsh medium output during the pandemic will need to take place at many levels, from individuals

and social clubs engaging on social media to national festivals broadcast on Youtube. Without the ability to generate content we risk losing the momentum we have started.

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should review and update its Cymraeg 2050 action plan and the Welsh language technology action plan to reflect the rapid change to online Welsh language learning, activities and cultural events that has facilitated its use at home and grown interest in the language abroad.

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should ensure that training is available for organisations and individuals to ensure they make the most of online opportunities to promote the use of Welsh and support their members.

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should update its Digital Strategy to reflect the greater need for fast, reliable internet service across Wales in light of the increased reliance on digital content following the COVID-19 outbreak.

## Impact on language learning

**44.** The Committee discussed the impact on learning Welsh as a second language and education through the medium of Welsh. The Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy anticipates that education will be the main driver for increasing the number of Welsh speakers.

**45.** Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol ('the Coleg') provided written evidence to the Committee to outline the measures it has taken to ensure the provision of Welsh medium education in the post compulsory sector continues to be available. The Coleg wrote, 'One of the Coleg's greatest concerns is that learners will be less likely to choose Welsh-medium or bilingual provision when starting college or an apprenticeship in September, as many of them have not been in a Welsh-speaking environment since the start of lockdown'.<sup>51</sup>

**46.** In terms of Higher Education, it has extended its incentive scholarship scheme from the usual 200 pupils to target 500 pupils. It has provided online training to Welsh medium lecturers on online teaching. The Coleg consulted lecturers to identify short-term gaps in digital resources, with a view to

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<sup>51</sup> Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol written evidence



commissioning 'high quality blended learning materials in a specific number of subjects' although it says additional resources will be needed to achieve this.<sup>52</sup>

**47.** The Coleg warns that 'the lack of Welsh and bilingual digital resources is one of the main challenges facing Welsh-medium and bilingual provision' of Further Education and Apprenticeships.<sup>53</sup> The Coleg has placed relevant resources on a new 'Resource Portal' but calls for a national plan to identify and commission resources for learners and educators. In the meantime the Coleg is co-ordinating resources for priority areas such as health care, childcare and public services.

**48.** The National Centre for Learning Welsh responded to the increasing demand for Welsh lessons by combining remote tutor-led learning and online learning, leading to the registration of 1,300 learners and 89 new classes. Since March, almost 8,000 people have registered for online taster courses, more than in the previous three years combined.

**49.** However, the move to online provision and the pausing of in-person lessons had an effect on the Centre's budget. Efa Gruffudd Jones, The National Centre for Learning Welsh, wrote:

'Early on in the transformation period (at the end of March 2020), the Centre discussed a decrease in its budget with the Welsh Government as the Government considered its own budgets and its response to the pandemic. The result of this was a £1.687 million cut to the Centre's budget between April 2020 and August 2021, with 46 per cent (£1.145 million) cut from the Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh budget. The Centre will, therefore, have to pause some of its plans and will consider opportunities for employees to learn Welsh by different means over the coming period.

The Centre hopes that this is a temporary cut, and that the recent response has demonstrated that there is public appetite for Welsh lessons. However, discussions on further cuts to the budget continue.'<sup>54</sup>

**50.** There is no doubt that the cancellation of events such as the Urdd Eisteddfod, the National Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Show has reduced the opportunities for learners to practice their skills. Although he cautioned that it is

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<sup>52</sup> Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol written evidence

<sup>53</sup> Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol written evidence

<sup>54</sup> The National Eisteddfod written evidence

too early to say what the full impact of the pandemic has been on the Welsh language, Aled Roberts, the Welsh Language Commissioner, said:

‘all of the postponement and cancellations of events does actually take away from the ability of people who are fluent in Welsh to use the Welsh language, but also it has an impact on Welsh learners.’<sup>55</sup>

**51.** He commented on the budget cut to the National Centre for Learning Welsh’s Cymraeg Gwaith programme, emphasising the need to upskill the workforce, saying:

‘we too are eager, if there is an intention that learning Welsh moves entirely online, that we also recommence the Cymraeg Gwaith programme’.<sup>56</sup>

### Welsh Govt comment response

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**52.** The Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language commented on the funding for the National Centre for Learning Welsh. She said:

‘they had to cease face-to-face training in classrooms overnight. Now, as a result of that, there was a means for them to make savings, so that was an opportunity for us to reclaim some funding, because it was impossible for them to actually spend it at that time. What they have done is to take the opportunity to adapt their operations and to do a lot more of their work online, and that has helped learners to learn digitally and remotely, and they've seen a great increase in the number of people learning.’<sup>57</sup>

**53.** She said that funding had been redirected from the Cymraeg Gwaith project when lessons could not be provided to health service workers due to the pandemic. This funding had been reclaimed and had been provided ‘to those organisations facing financial difficulties.’<sup>58</sup>

### **Our view on the impact of the pandemic on learning**

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<sup>55</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p13

<sup>56</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p41

<sup>57</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p33

<sup>58</sup> CWLC Committee 1 October 2020, p34

We applaud the National Centre for Learning Welsh's ability to respond to this major increase in interest in learning Welsh so effectively. The Centre told the Committee that its early decision to establish a digital platform designed around the student, has paid dividends. However, the cancellation of face-to-face learning has meant a substantial budget cut to the Cymraeg Gwaith/ Work Welsh programme. The importance of in-person lessons cannot be overestimated, especially in healthcare settings where it is essential to increase the number of professionals who can speak Welsh.

The impact of the lockdown on Welsh learning in the community and in the workplace will need to be properly assessed in order to mitigate for the lack of opportunities to learn in person. Equally, the huge increase in people wanting to learn Welsh during the lockdown, and their ability to access online resources and teaching should be examined to gather examples of best practice.

The Cymraeg 2050 strategy action plan should be updated in light of the shift towards online learning in order to mine the opportunities to reach a wider audience and support learners' journey to fluency.

**Recommendation 6.** The next Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy action plan should take full account of the changes in learning opportunities now available. It will need to consider the ways in which online learning and in-person lessons can be blended to best suit learners, and the level of funding needed to ensure that the growth in online learning can be sustained.

Annex – Evidence for this inquiry was provided by the following individuals and organisations

Name	Organisation
Efa Gruffudd Jones	National Centre for Learning Welsh
Bethan Ruth Roberts	Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg
Caryl Haf	Wales Young Farmers' Clubs
Betsan Moses	National Eisteddfod of Wales
Helgard Krause	Books Council of Wales
Lowri Jones	Mentrau Iaith Cymru
Siân Lewis	Urdd Gobaith Cymru
Tegwen Morris	Merched y Wawr
Aled Roberts	Welsh Language Commissioner
Eluned Morgan MS	Minister for International Affairs and the Welsh Language, Welsh Government
Gwenllian Griffiths	Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol