# Questions to the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language on his speech *Cymraeg: it belongs to us all* (delivered at M-SParc on Thursday 10 February 2022).

This is a list of questions submitted either by members of the the in-person audience or by remote viewers of the Minister’s address, together with the Minister’s answers to them. They are not presented in any specific order.

At the start of your lecture, you said that we need to make some brave changes. What exactly do you mean?

I’ve spoken about how important it is that we continue to learn as part of supporting our language, so we can build on our successes. It also means that we’ve got to look at some of the things we’ve been doing and ask whether they’re still fit for purpose, and we’ll find that some of them aren’t quite doing what we need them to do. I’ve spoken a lot about use. I’ve also spoken about empowerment, and we’re looking at our grant scheme to make sure it dovetails with Cymraeg 2050. We need to be brave and look at what’s happening in terms of evidence. We need to look at what’s working and what’s really happening at grassroots level. This will help us to make sure that our policies reflect today’s needs.

There are a number of organisations here tonight. So organisations need to consider whether projects and schemes are working, and put up their hands if things aren’t working, be honest and think of other options?

I think the past two years have made everything more challenging, but we’ve also seen some real successes. The National Centre for Learning Welsh and the huge increase in adult learning over the past two years has been a great success. And we’ve learnt that we can’t just carry on with the same range of policy if we want to provide more education for adults online. We have to prioritise, and we’ve all got a responsibility to take a look at what we’re doing and whether it’s working.

You’ve mentioned that you want everyone to be part of the debate about how we can make sure our language prospers. What do you want the audience here and those listening tonight to do on a practical level?

Well, we need to work together of course, but there’s also some decisions we can take individually. It’s a challenge for us to look at how we behave and whether we can do things differently. I’ll give you an example. I was at a meeting in a school earlier today and everyone in the room bar one person could speak Welsh. We immediately switched to English. As it happens, the person who couldn’t speak Welsh understood the language perfectly. To be honest, I didn’t even ask myself whether we needed to change to English. We just switched languages, because we took it for granted that we needed to. But we could have carried on in Welsh with this person contributing in English. He would have been happy and it would have worked for everyone in the room. So, we need to think about things like this. It’s language assertiveness, and the university in Valencia, Mudiad Meithrin and others are working on this. They’re looking at how we can be more confident about using Welsh ourselves. There may be a little tension here between the decision and our skills, which is something personal, and use, which is a social action. I think it’s a challenge we all need to consider and we need to ask ourselves whether the balance is in the right place.

How will you share your message about encouraging people to use the Welsh they’ve got?

Well, I’ve just told you what happened today, and I think that’s a good example. It’s partly how we chat about Welsh. I’ve tried to make my language inclusive tonight, inviting people to use the Welsh they’ve got and so on. We know that the time when young people leave school is a kind of linguistic lottery. Some carry on using their Welsh, and others don’t, so they lose their confidence. This isn’t just an individual decision, there’s a social element to all this. And that’s why use is so important. Having people around you using a language you can speak can give you the context you need to carry on.

You’ve mentioned a number of schemes in your speech. Let’s turn to the details. These co-operative organisations, will there be new money?

Yes. We’re already supporting the co-operative movement. We know it needs support so it can expand, so that’s my aim, and I’ll have more to say soon.

The Commission next. Something else you raised, with Dr Simon Brooks. What will be its terms of reference? Have you put those in place yet? And when will they be starting?

The Commission’s part of our Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan, which is still out for consultation at the moment. We’re committed to setting up the Commission and it’ll begin its work once we’ve completed the consultation. I want to have a clear understanding of what’s happening to our language in communities across Wales, so that we, along with other organisations and local authorities can provide a policy response based on real evidence. The consultation gives us a chance to look at areas of linguistic sensitivity— something I mentioned in my speech, and this approach may allow a different policy response that’s right for Welsh in that community, be that a response from us here in Welsh Government or from local authorities. I’m not suggesting a Gaelacht; what I am suggesting is that we’ll have a range of linguistic scenarios which we’ll be able to use in different areas. Maybe in education, or in planning perhaps. It’s an exciting prospect.

You said that the Commission’s work could feed into a number of areas across the Government. Your words suggest that the Cabinet’s attitude towards the language has changed. Has this been your experience over the past few months?

I believe that our language’s success is a cross-governmental priority for us all, just like climate change, tackling poverty and so on. Some of these wider themes like climate change are far more prominent on things like social media than our language, so we’ve got to make sure that we give the same level of priority to Welsh, and there’s definitely a government-wide commitment to do this. We already have examples of good practice, and now, we have a chance to work in a new way making sure language policy, climate change policy and so on link to each other. This goes much further than just telling each other that we’ve thought about how this affects our language. It’s about developing policy in a range of areas in such a way that we explain the positive and negative effect on our language right from the start, so it’s always considered and always part of the debate. We’ve got a transformational plan across Government, within the Civil Service to make sure we’re moving forward and making progress on mainstreaming the language. This would be a challenge for any government of any party, I suppose. There’s an institutional tendency to look at things within specific portfolios, and at one level, ’that’s natural, but it’s not ideal. Brexit and COVID have shown us—and it’s probably happened in other places as well—that we have to work in a far more collaborative way, and I’m convinced that’s good for our language.

Time for your education hat now. Will there be more money to deliver your decision to offer free Welsh lessons to 16-25 year olds? And when exactly will these lessons be available?

Yes, there’s money available, and our plan is that from September, 16 to 25 year olds can sign up for Welsh lessons with the Centre. The team at the Centre will also be piloting different ways of providing opportunities for 16 to 18 years old. So, if you’re an apprentice or at school, you’ll be able to sign up for these lessons. And it’s broader than that of course. If you’re a head teacher, teacher or teaching assistant, then you can access free lessons. Of course, there’s a lot of provision already available for the education workforce, but the plan is to bring everything together. If you’re a teacher, you’ll be able to decide whether it’s the sabbatical scheme or an online course that works for you. Everything will be in one place so everyone can choose for themselves.

You referred to the Census. We can’t ignore it, although most of the information isn’t out yet. Have you had a glimpse at all at some of these preliminary figures? Can you give us any hints? Can more people speak Welsh?

I don’t know what the figures are, and I won’t know what they are before they’re published. Let’s look at it in a wider context though. I’ve said that language use is one of our main goals, but the Census doesn’t measure use. Other surveys do that for us in a far more reliable way. But we use the Census as our criterion for the language, and at the moment, we don’t know what the figures will say. We also don’t quite know when they’ll be published, so that’ll be a surprise! However, even if it’s good news, and we really hope it is, we still need to look at our range of policies, and consider whether we’ve got the balance right. We still need to ask whether the context has changed, and whether the work we’re planning will meet the challenges on the horizon? So that process of continually asking ourselves whether we’re on the right track is just as important as ever.

What’s the Government’s current opinion on using the linguistic continuum as a way of measuring learners’ progress? It feels as though the idea creates a problem for the education sector but is that a barrier from using it within the Welsh for Adults sector, especially for schemes such as Working Welsh?

Tonight’s theme is that Cymraeg belongs to us all. That is, one language and everyone has their part to play. Now, everyone starts their linguistic journey from a different place. Not everyone speaks Welsh at home and so on. I think it’s important that we look at our language as one experience, the same path, and that we’re all just at different places on that same path. Let’s look at it inclusively—how people get to our language and how we can make sure everyone has equal access to learning. So it’s important that we look at how this continuum can extend beyond school. We’ve been chatting about how popular adult lessons are, so let’s make sure we understand where these milestones are on our education journey, by looking at it all as one linguistic continuum. By doing this, we can all see where we are on our own language continuum. We’re not quite there yet. We need to look at school qualifications and adult education qualifications as part of the same continuum, and map where a certain level or skill sits on that journey. And then there’s another question—how can we make sure we’re providing real progression? The two things are related. Believe me, I’m not under-estimating the challenge at grassroots level at all, but I think that we’ve got the concept right.

We understand that the Welsh Government intends to extend the funding cycle of some third sector organisations to enable them to better plan and develop more effective long-term strategies. I wonder if there are any plans to do that for the Mentrau Iaith, which have no certainty from year to year?

Anyone who knows how the third sector works knows how challenging it is just to look a year ahead from a budgeting point of view, and having to make some very uncomfortable decisions at the end of the Year. Losing capacity, losing valuable expertise—all these things we don’t want to see. And it doesn’t just happen in the language sector. It’s wider than that, and as a government, we’ve already said that we’re looking at what we can do to provide more certainty for our partner organisations within a slightly longer time frame. There’s a little more certainty in the way we get our settlement from Westminster now, so there’s some flexibility there. No decisions have been taken yet, but it’s something for us to look at. Obviously, there’s no guarantee that we can offer more than a year but we’re looking at it.

Are the processes involved in responding to the vitally important consultations on the housing crisis inaccessible to the very people who are suffering the worst of the crisis? There is a commendable emphasis on community empowerment in the Welsh-speaking Community Housing Scheme: is it not time to apply the same principle to consultation on policy formulation that is particularly relevant to those communities?

We need to empower people; we need to respond to the reality within our communities, and we need to do all this in a way that works for that specific community. We’re not talking about the same policy interventions everywhere. The situation’s different in various parts of Wales, so it’s really important that we listen to people, hear what’s really happening on the ground. I don’t think the consultation process has been inaccessible. We’ve been consulting online to begin, and as with all our policies, we’ll organise focus groups and engage with communities themselves as we develop the policy. The consultation establishes the policy base and our options, which we then discuss and develop with the communities most affected. So there’ll be plenty of opportunities to get involved in the discussions.

Recommendation 7 of your COVID report states: More Welsh-medium social / co-operatives should be created that offer Welsh-medium job and volunteering opportunities in our communities. Prior to the pandemic, the Mentrau Iaith had written a paper proposing the creation of a network of officers who would support the creation of Social Enterprises. Following discussions, it was confirmed that the government economy department would be willing to part fund a pilot, but unfortunately, the pandemic struck. Can the Minister, therefore, secure additional funding for the Mentrau Iaith through the economy department to develop this work?

We want to create a network of organisations that will create opportunities for what we’ve called ‘monolingual spaces’ as I mentioned in my speech, I’m not going to comment on the Mentrau Iaith paper here, but what I’ll say is that we want to hear from anyone with an idea or proposal which will help us to reach our goal. Lots of organisations have already said they believe we’re doing the right thing, and it’s certainly an ambitious plan. I think we’ll find that the expertise to deliver the plan comes from a number of different directions. I want to see organisations—co-operatives—succeeding in our communities. And my question at the moment is ‘what does the end of the journey look like?’

How do you measure the effectiveness of the work of publicly funded organisations in working with young people such as the Mentrau Iaith and the Urdd in providing opportunities for 16-25 year olds in Further Education colleges (two thirds of the population of Wales aged 16-18), and are there plans to create a long-term strategy for the majority of young people learning Welsh in English-medium schools? What’s the vision and how do we achieve success?

We measure effectiveness by evaluating work, and we do this every year as part of our budget allocation process. I’ve mentioned that we’re looking at our grant scheme, because I want to make sure we’re doing everything we can to get to grips with the challenges we’ve set ourselves in Cymraeg 2050. Our funding relationship with every organisation is evidence based, and the two organisations you’ve mentioned have a commendable ‘track record’ of work with apprenticeships and so on. Before Christmas I announced our categorisation policy, and our aim is to help schools know where they are on the linguistic continuum, but it’s also to help them to move along the continuum. There are two challenges; the first is to make sure we have a teaching framework, which can help our pupils to move along this continuum, and work’s already begun to create this framework. However, perhaps the biggest challenge is to make sure we’ve got a workforce that can provide education through the medium of Welsh either in a Welsh-medium school or in a school where Welsh isn’t the main language. And that’s a big challenge. Of all the things that keep me awake, I’d say the two biggest challenges are what’s going on in our communities where Welsh is the main language—and there are many challenges here—and the second challenge is to make sure we have enough Welsh-speaking teachers and assistants who can teach Welsh and through the medium of Welsh. We’re doing a lot of work with stakeholders, and some of them are in this room, to address this. We’ll have to be brave. We may have to change the incentives, the way we plan our work, and how teachers enter the profession. We just need to look at everything in an open-minded and creative way. I hope I can say more about this later.

Just as important as learning the language is learning and understanding the history of the language, so we understand the context in which some speak it and others do not. Does the new Curriculum require further prepared resources to support similar learning across schools in Wales including English medium schools?

I agree! And I’m pleased to say that our new Curriculum allows us to look at this. As a Government, we commission a wide range of resources for the Curriculum through other organisations and bodies. And one of the great things about the new Curriculum is that learning about the history of our language is now a compulsory part of Welsh history now. So we’ve got to make sure there’s resources and training available to make this happen. Teachers will choose what it actually looks like at a local level based on the resources and support we’ve provided.

At the moment, we’re only just beginning to combine the Cymraeg 2050 agenda with tackling poverty and disadvantage and targeting those non-traditional Welsh speaking communities. How can you as a Minister strategically link this agenda within Government to tackling poverty and ensure that there’s free access to the Welsh language to the more non-traditional communities and how can we raise awareness of the benefits of bilingualism to parents in those communities?

This is a very timely question because I’ve actually been discussing this on the Island today at Ysgol Cybi. I’ve been looking at how they’ve succeeded in attracting children from non-Welsh speaking homes and how they ensure that these children receive Welsh-medium education. There’s also a language unit on site to offer wider support. It’s inspirational. It’s great to see how successful they’ve been in such a short space of time. And I’ve seen this in other parts of Wales too. Go to Ysgol Penydre in Merthyr, and you’ll see in one of our most deprived communities The pupils are passionate about our language. It’s already happening across Wales, and it’s up to use to share this with other school and with other communities.

This notion of linguistic assertiveness is important and it belongs to the individual but also to communities, and one thing that’s been lost in many communities, including Welsh-speaking communities here on Anglesey is this community confidence in the language, and this is reflected in the lack of transmission of our language from one generation to the next. How can we grow that confidence in our Welsh? Also however influential politicians can be, they’re not going to be the most influential. I’m thinking of the Football Association of Wales and the work they’ve done over the past few years in normalising the Welsh language and influencing our Welsh speakers of the future. Who are the partners the Government is working with now to do the ‘heavy lifting’ to bring people who’ve never considered the language on the linguistic journey with us?

Well, that’s a great example, and there’s lots of other examples This community confidence is linked on one level with economic prosperity. It ties back to the question I was asked earlier about combining our agenda with the tackling poverty agenda. The two things are related. I’ve been here in MSparc all afternoon, looking at what’s going on with technology. It’s broadening people’s horizons and giving them a clear idea that there are globally important developments going on, and they’re happening here, in this building. And that gives people the impetus to think they can have a local career in an international field, which for me is innovative, and the Welsh language is part everything. I went to Ysgol Bodedern earlier and saw what Menter Môn are doing with local entrepreneurship- local young people with local business ideas. This kind of thing is integral to what we’re discussing; Organisations working in the community, for the benefit of the community and giving back to the community, with our language playing a central role in everything. We haven’t discussed language transmission tonight, so let me just say one thing. You’re right to say we’ve talked about education, we’ve discussed communities and what’s going on at home is also important. We’ve been doing some interesting stuff. We’ve been learning from the behavioural sciences, looking at things that aren’t specifically language policy led, and we’re bringing ideas from other areas into our language planning. There’s some good work happening here in north Wales. Bangor University’s Arfer scheme looks at how we can use behavioural science techniques to encourage people who *can* speak Welsh but *don’t* use it at work. And they’re looking to expand the project into other public services. So we’re looking outwards and learning techniques and interventions in other fields as we design our own policies.

How can you make people feel that the language belongs to them? What exactly can people do to make sure that this message reaches everyone and that they realise that they have a duty, if they’ve had Welsh-medium education to continue to use Welsh in the future so that they play a part in this target as well?

I’m not going to use the word ‘duty’. It’s not that at all. We want people to have this feeling of belonging to our language. Let me explain. Opinion polls in Wales show that everyone in Wales has a relationship with our language. People are proud to speak Welsh, and many of those who don’t speak our language feel they’ve missed out. We need to make sure we always chat about Welsh in a warm and inclusive way. Look at some of the statements on Twitter recently. I’d call them ‘click bait’, and it doesn’t matter how clever or intelligent the authors are. Last week, Jonathan Meade wrote some nonsense about the language and I decided not to respond. He has no interest in our language’s success, so why turn it into a discussion? All it does is turn it into an exclusive argument—and we want our language to be inclusive. However, I did decide to respond to respond to Jeremy Bowen’s tweet, and I said ‘come and learn Welsh—it belongs to you too’. And that’s the message we need to share——let’s involve people rather than exclude them.

We welcome so much of what you’ve said, and of course the Urdd has a role. And I think the big thing is experience. You referred to your upbringing in a Welsh-speaking household, similar to mine. The experience people get of Welsh outside the classroom is vital. The language thrives with the creation of co-operatives in our communities, but the critical age is from about 14, so that they get special experiences of Welsh, and that it inspires them to share the language with their children, and with others.

The Urdd’s very good at encouraging people to use whatever Welsh they have. Everyone has a Welsh language experience-whether it’s positive or negative to be honest, and that stays with you throughout your life. I want to see people encouraging others to use whatever Welsh they have, and I want to see people using our language regularly. Learning a little bit more. Using a little bit more. And let’s celebrate and welcome this rather than being critical. It’s a great way to share our language.

I’m an admirer of Saunders Lewis and the quotes you used in your lecture. He had another quote, which is another quote is ‘success comes by revolutionary means’ (trwy ddulliau chwyldro mae llwyddo) Are you confident that these plans will work? And how do we measure this success?

One of Saunders Lewis’ other quotes is that ‘there’s nothing more comforting than despair’ (does dim byd yn fwy cysurus nag anobaith). We’ve got to have hope, and there’s reason for us to be hopeful. I think things were a little bit different back in 1962 when Saunders Lewis spoke about ‘revolutionary means’. The message this evening is that we need to be brave and courageous rather than revolutionary, when we deal with the ever-changing challenges. And I’m sure we’ll respond to these challenges as a nation for the sake and success of our language.

How do we get young people onto Welsh courses? It’s difficult to get young Welsh speakers to choose further and higher education in Welsh. Will it not be even more difficult to persuade this age group to sign up to courses? Some of them will have had a negative experience of Welsh at school.

We need to look at how we communicate with our different audiences. The Centre [for Learning Welsh], Duo Lingo and Say Something in Welsh are all doing great work to spread the message and create opportunities for people to join us. I know people who’ve started learning with Duolingo. I also know people who’ve started learning on online courses. It’s our role to guide people along the language learning path, and we need to do it in a creative way. We’ve already chatted about our language experience—our relationship with our language. Some people didn’t have a great experience learning Welsh at school. Perhaps Welsh wasn’t the main language, so they may not have had the chance to learn Welsh in a way that works for them. And that’s going to affect a person’s perspective. So how do we deal with it? We need to tell people that there are plenty of different ways to learn Welsh, not just at school, although that’s where lots of people start learning. People need to learn in a way that works for them, at different points in their lives. Beginning as well as re-joining the language journey. And this year, there’ll be a new and exciting free option too.

With the recent success of the Cardiff University campaign for Vice President responsible for the language, do you think Students’ Unions, public bodies and other bodies should be included in legislation to protect Welsh language rights?

It’s great news that Cardiff has followed the lead of many universities by creating a dedicated sabbatical officer to deal with our Language.

More than 120 public bodies already come under Welsh Language Standards, which work to protect the rights of Welsh speakers. We are planning to bring more bodies under the Standards system – including health bodies, water companies, train companies, and Housing Associations.

The announcement of free lessons for teachers and under 25s is fantastic. Congratulations to the Minister this. Does the Government have any plans to develop these into complete courses, as has happened for thousands of teachers in the Basque Country?

There’ll be a full range of lessons for education workers, and young people under 25, at all levels. We want to offer something that suits everyone. Some of these courses already exist and we’re working with the Centre to develop others. Teachers will, for example, be able to take advantage of courses that range from online self-study taster lessons to a sabbatical scheme that offers periods of intensive study to a more traditional ‘classroom-based’ format.

There’ll also be courses available for young people, from taster courses for those with a little bit of Welsh, to more advanced opportunities for people who just want to improve their skills.

Do you think non-Welsh speaking young people have a desire to learn the language, and how can we ensure young people have the confidence to learn Welsh?

Over lockdown we saw how keen people of all ages are to learn Welsh. We need to build on that enthusiasm. There’s more people than ever learning Welsh and online courses offer flexible learning for everyone. We’ll be creating specific provision for our young people to make sure the levels and teaching styles work for everyone.

May I ask what exactly the Government will do to move English-medium schools forward to become bilingual schools, how they will achieve this, and how they will ensure that this happens at grassroots level, please? Thank you.

We’ve categorised school according to their Welsh language provision, and now it’s much clearer and easier to see what’s expected by the school and by the pupils themselves. It’s also a great tool for us to encourage and support schools to increase their provision in Welsh. Here’s a link to our guidance: [School categories according to Welsh-medium provision](https://gov.wales/school-categories-according-to-welsh-medium-provision).

We want every school in Wales to increase their learning opportunities in Welsh, and we’re currently out for consultation on a non-statutory framework for the teaching of Welsh in English-medium education, to complement this work, which also includes supporting materials, resources and additional professional learning. Have your say here! [Draft framework for Welsh in English medium education | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/draft-framework-welsh-english-medium-education)

Is there a plan to attract new Welsh speaking tutors to choose a career in Welsh for adults, in order to respond to these new requirements?

We want to make sure that there’s plenty of professional people working in our Learning Welsh sector. The National Centre for Learning Welsh’s Academi Scheme develops the Welsh for Adults workforce’s skills, and they’ve also developed a national training programme for tutors, and a nationally recognised qualification. This is a major step forward in professionalising and increasing the status of the field.

The Centre also has a scheme to recruit new tutors, and knows how important it is to have a wide range of jobs within the sector — including full-time, part-time and fractional tutors. This makes the sector far more attractive to potential employees and makes it easier to find tutors to work various hours, such as teaching evening classes.

Free Welsh language courses for young people are great, but why should someone in Wales have to pay to learn the language?

There’s more provision available than ever before, and the Centre has created partnerships with Say Something in Welsh and Duolingo. There’s a closer community of learners than ever and by working together it’s been possible to make sure that the approaches and content of the lessons complement each other. The Centre’s courses cost £90 each, but there is a discount scheme available, and there’s also a grant available for individuals. For more information see: [Frequently Asked Questions | Learn Welsh](https://learnwelsh.cymru/support/questions-and-answers/).

Is the Minister looking forward to reading the 22 strategic plans for Welsh in education and what does he hopes to see in them?

I’ve been totally clear from the start that I expect these plans to be in line with the ambitions we’ve set out in Cymraeg 2050, and it’s encouraging to see that every county has committed to the targets we gave them.