



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

# Welsh-medium education through late immersion: mapping the provision in Wales (summary)

The report presents the findings of a study that was undertaken to explore factors associated with late immersion provision in different areas of Wales.

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## Research objectives and methodology

### Introduction

This report presents the findings of a mapping exercise examining Welsh-medium education through late immersion (for latecomers) in different areas in Wales.

### Research objectives

The aim of this mapping exercise was to form a picture of the late immersion education provision that existed in some local education authorities at the time, and to understand some of the challenges and opportunities that arise as provision is planned and implemented. The research objectives were to examine:

- the circumstances and needs that different models of provision address
- the structure and content of the different models
- current provision in the context of how provision has evolved over time
- plans for future provision

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The study also identifies some considerations relating to the extent to which existing arrangements allow the effectiveness of the models to be assessed. For the purposes of this mapping exercise, the term 'late immersion education' was used to cover a variety of models and types of provision, used at different entry points in the primary and secondary sectors.

The Welsh Language Research Branch, in Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services, was commissioned to undertake the mapping exercise by the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Division. The study was undertaken and the report produced as part of a five-month PhD internship organised through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Wales Doctoral Training Partnership and Welsh Government. The research took place between January and April 2021.

## Policy context

Late immersion education is a provision that allows latecomers to access Welsh-medium education at stages later than the Foundation Phase. Such provision has existed in Wales for a number of decades, and in a number of different ways (through designated centres, language units, and within schools). The Welsh Government's aim in its *Cymraeg 2050* strategy is to reach a million speakers by the middle of the century (Welsh Government 2017a). Late immersion provision is a key part of achieving this aim, as it increases the number of entry points to the Welsh-medium and bilingual sector throughout a learner's education career.

As part of the strategy to reach a million speakers, the Welsh Government has stated its commitment to 'consider the role of late language immersion centres in supporting the Welsh-medium sector and whether such support should be available in all local authorities' (Welsh Government 2020: 28). Since 2019, there is a statutory requirement for local authorities to report on their late immersion provision through their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). In the context of supporting local authorities and schools to plan to increase late immersion provision, and Welsh-medium provision more widely, it is important to look at existing provision, and to consider the extent to which the effectiveness of the provision offered can be measured, in order to develop an understanding

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of which models work well in different parts of Wales.

## Methodology

The methodology comprised desk-based work and interviews with stakeholders involved in the planning of late immersion provision. Desk-based work was completed between January and April 2021. This entailed an examination and analysis of relevant policy documents and administrative data (including local authority WESPs for the period 2017-2020), and publications and literature to situate the work in its policy context.

Interviews were conducted between January and March 2021. Interviews were conducted with Welsh Government policy officials as part of the initial scoping of the research. Interviews were conducted with local authorities based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The areas of research focused on specific aspects of provision or plans for developing the provision for the future. For that reason, it was decided to include local authorities offering provision, and authorities where provision has changed fairly recently, or authorities currently planning provision. Fourteen local authorities were invited to participate in the research based on the criteria; 10 were available to participate in the research within the time available to complete the project. Interviews were also conducted with officials from the four regional education consortia, and an Estyn representative. All interviews were conducted over Teams video conferencing software to meet social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Limitations of the methodology

The mapping exercise does not provide a complete picture of late immersion education provision in Wales. It was not possible to interview all local authorities where late immersion provision is offered, and the situation and experiences of local authorities that do not have late immersion provision were not examined. It should not be assumed that these local authorities do not plan to offer late immersion education provision in their next 10-year WESPs, and it was not possible to explore whether there were any specific reasons why they have not

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yet developed the provision. It is possible that these authorities could have offered views that would have further enriched the research. Owing to differences in the internal structures of local authorities and regional education consortia, the job titles and responsibilities of participants varied. As a result, not everyone interviewed had the same level of involvement in the provision, which may have influenced their ability to address all areas to the same level of detail, or from the same perspective.

## **Main findings**

### **Types of provision**

The provision of late immersion education varies between local authorities. Of the authorities interviewed, some offer the provision in designated immersion centres, whilst others offer peripatetic provision. In some cases the provision is offered within the school itself.

### **Challenges and opportunities**

#### **Main challenges**

Some authorities are facing cuts in the funding received through the Education Improvement Grant, and the type of provision offered is often driven by the amount of funding allocated for the provision. Some authorities reported that planning transport to late immersion centres can be challenging because of the cost, and in some cases learners' time in late immersion is reduced owing to transport arrangements.

A few local authorities referred to the fact that there is no statutory requirement for latecomers to attend late immersion education provision. Local authorities are therefore dependent on the goodwill of parents to agree to their children receiving the provision. There was some evidence that some parents can be unwilling to send their children to centres because they are concerned that the

children will miss out on opportunities in the mainstream.

Some of the local authorities had planned their provision on the basis of evidence from other local authorities. From the evidence gathered, it appears that there was limited use of research and evidence in planning the provision. Observations were also provided about the lack of research evidence to support local authorities in planning their provision.

Some noted that there were risks associated with the forward planning of provision and anticipating demand because late immersion provision often responds to people's movement in and out of the area.

On the basis of the evidence gathered, staff in late immersion provision are very experienced in some local authorities where provision is long-standing, with some having worked in the field for over 15 years. One challenge faced is the need to ensure specific training for late immersion teachers who are new to the work. In some places, the training takes place in-house in settings, as practitioners undertake their work.

In terms of offering ongoing support for latecomers, some of the local authorities interviewed offered an outreach service to provide further support beyond the late immersion period, and others offered to extend the duration of the provision if latecomers needed further support. In some cases, latecomers are not supported through an aftercare scheme on their return to the mainstream.

Although links exist between LAs, regional education consortia and the Welsh Government in relation to the provision of late immersion education, the nature of these links is varied and complex. In the main, LAs take a strategic lead on all aspects of planning provision.

## **Main opportunities**

Some participants noted that they worked together and shared resources by building relationships between authorities, and between authorities and the regional education consortia. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had presented an additional challenge to local authorities in terms of planning and offering their

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provision, overall, participants saw that there could be opportunities in the future to expand their late immersion provision, and the provision of aftercare, on the basis of the experience of blended learning and the technology used to teach remotely. Some of the local authorities interviewed noted that the setting for late immersion provision is also used for other purposes when there is no demand for provision for latecomers.

## Measuring the impact of the provision

The evidence from this mapping exercise suggests that there are variations in the way in which the effectiveness of late immersion education provision is measured and interpreted. The impact of the provision is mainly measured through the improvement in the linguistic ability of latecomers. On the basis of the evidence gathered, it appears that progress is not recorded in the form of robust data in all cases; there is, instead, a dependency on narrative evidence from teachers. Nevertheless, some local authorities recognised that more formal methods were needed to track progress, in order to measure the impact of the provision and learners' progress over time.

## Future considerations

On the basis of the evidence gathered through this study, the following considerations are presented as areas for discussion as late immersion provision is planned for the future.

- When planning to expand late immersion provision, consideration could be given to whether it is necessary to develop a more detailed understanding of how much funding local authorities, consortia and schools allocate for late immersion provision, and what proportion of that funding is spent on transport costs.
- Local authorities could consider using their county's language policies and their WESPs to encourage parents to choose to send their children to late immersion centres. The Welsh Government could support this through their work with local authorities on developing their WESPs and by emphasising

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the importance of the centres in maintaining the language policies of individual schools.

- Methods of gathering information about the nature of training that local authorities or regional education consortia offer to practitioners in their late immersion provision could be considered. This could provide a basis for developing a comprehensive picture of the training offered, and for ensuring consistency and high standards for training across Wales.
- Consideration could be given to whether arrangements for aftercare following a period of late immersion need to be formalised or harmonised, with the aim of ensuring that learners receive the most appropriate support. As part of this, the role of teachers in supporting latecomers returning to the mainstream could be considered.
- The authorities interviewed have a great deal of experience in planning and delivering late immersion education. Possible ways to facilitate further collaboration between local authorities could be considered as well as with, and between, regional education consortia.
- Consideration could be given to ways to learn from the experiences gained from COVID-19 and to exploring the potential of blended learning and language learning techniques through virtual methods, when planning late immersion provision and subsequent support for learners.
- Also for possible consideration is whether there is potential for more providers of late immersion education to offer their settings for other uses when there is no demand for the provision.
- Currently, some local authorities use national level data to measure learners' progress. As new curriculum and assessment arrangements are implemented from 2022 onwards, the aim of tracking the progress of learners receiving late immersion provision will give rise to new questions. As possible ways of tracking progress over time are discussed, the use of the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to indicate whether a pupil is currently receiving late immersion provision, or has received such provision in the past, could also be considered.
- Developing a theory, or theories, of change could provide a useful basis for planning, and measuring the effectiveness of, late immersion programmes in the future. This would provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between the aims and objectives of models or programmes and the medium and longer term aims they are intended to meet. This would also provide an

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opportunity to identify and test the assumptions associated with the programmes and models, and to identify the external factors which could influence the implementation of the programmes.

- Developing theories of change would also provide a means of highlighting the types of evidence (qualitative and quantitative), and the data sources, which could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of the programmes.
- Attention should be given to the need for more research and evidence as a basis for developing policy in Welsh-medium late immersion provision.
- Consideration should also be given to methods of ensuring that regional education consortia and local authorities use research and evidence when planning new provision, and to refine and develop further the late immersion provision which already exists.
- It should be borne in mind that effective provision could look different in different parts of Wales. In planning the provision, and when evaluating its effectiveness, local needs and circumstances should be a central consideration.

## Contact details

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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