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Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
[Welsh Language Commissioner](mailto:WelshLanguageCommissioner)

01/03



**Comisiynydd y
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Welsh Language
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Lynne Neagle AS
Children, Young People and Education Committee Chair
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21/10/2020

Dear Chair,

Evidence on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

In giving evidence to the committee on 8 October 2020 I discussed the potential of including provisions in the Bill to establish a statutory basis for school language categories. During the Education Minister's evidence session on 21 October 2020, it was confirmed that the Bill would not include such provision, and that the Government would be consulting on new school language categories on a non-statutory basis before the end of the year.

One of the primary reasons for reforming school language categories in the first place was to move away from the current non-statutory framework. As I explain in my written response to the Committee's consultation on the Curriculum Bill, school language categories are not only crucial in terms of curriculum organisation, but also in implementing the Government's wider Welsh language education strategy, in particular in terms of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans. Placing such a framework on a non-statutory basis will undermine the strategic significance of the language categories as there will be no statutory basis for ensuring that local authorities and schools will follow the proposed framework correctly. This is, of course, part of the current problem.

According to the Minister, it was decided that school language categories is a school organisation matter, rather than a curriculum matter, and that the timetable for developing the new categories did not coincide with the timetable for introducing the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill. Despite the reasons outlined above, it remains unclear why the Government cannot include provisions in the Curriculum Bill for creating statutory

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regulations to define school language categories. Firstly, whilst I accept that the issue of school language categories has wider relevance beyond the curriculum, the categories are central to curriculum design and school organisation in terms of teaching and using the Welsh language. This point was made by the Government itself when the curriculum white paper was published in 2019. It should also be emphasised that the current guidance for the Languages, Literacy, and Communication Area of Learning and Experience (and one would presume the Progression Code when published) refers explicitly to schools in different language categories. In terms of timetable, the Minister has confirmed that the Government will be consulting on new school language categories before the end of the year, and it is unclear why regulations could not be published later. That is, the Curriculum Bill could include provisions for the creation of regulations, and the work of drawing up the regulations themselves could commence once the consultation process on the new categories is completed.

I am also eager to respond briefly to another point made by the Minister in replying to questions regarding the abolition of Welsh as a second language and creating a single continuum for teaching the Welsh language. She mentioned that she was of the opinion that a great deal of detail was already included in the guidance for the Languages, Literacy and Communication AoLE, especially in terms of expectations placed on learners and in terms of progression. It was also mentioned that the Government would welcome further detail on what we, and others, argue is missing from the Bill and current guidelines. In this context, our written response to the Committee's consultation on the Bill, and our response to question 6.1 in particular, provide such details and explain my perspective on the content of the guidelines.

In my opinion, there has yet to be any significant, specific or practical work published regarding the Welsh language continuum, and how it will, over a period of time, lead to the raising of standards across all schools in Wales. I fully support the vision of abolishing Welsh as a second language, but in the absence of further guidance and instruction I fear that we will inevitably be repeating the failures of the past, and that the education system in Wales will continue to deprive the majority of young people the opportunity to be able to speak and use both Welsh and English. I am very concerned that the Welsh Government is missing a golden opportunity through the Curriculum Bill to realise one of the core objectives of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy, namely, to ensure that every pupil in Wales has the opportunity to develop into a confident Welsh speaker.

It is clear that the Minister has a commendable vision for the Welsh language in statutory education, but further action is needed if this vision is to be realised. To be absolutely clear, I am not criticising the proposed curriculum as a starting point for learners in English medium schools, but rather that the curriculum needs to be complemented by a longer-term vision and framework. A statutory code published in the wake of the Curriculum Bill could serve this purpose, and would provide a statutory mechanism for raising expectations and standards incrementally, working gradually towards the long term objectives and targets of Cymraeg 2050. Such a code need not be published before the



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end of this Government's term and the period prior to the curriculum coming to force could allow sufficient time to develop and refine the content of the code. It would be useful to bring together experts to draw up the code, and potentially this could be done alongside the work focused on developing the new qualifications for the Welsh language.

I urge the committee to consider the potentially far reaching impact the inclusion of a duty to generate a statutory code for teaching of Welsh, and also regulations for defining the language categories of schools, could have upon future generations of Welsh pupils. I fear that a failure to implement such important changes will mean a continuation of the status quo with respect to Welsh as a subject and as a medium of teaching. This will inevitably lead to another generation of pupils that are deprived of the opportunity of becoming bilingual.

Yours sincerely,

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