

Minister for Education and Welsh Language meeting with Welsh Council for
Voluntary Action (WCVA)

30.11.21 - 9.00 to 10.00am via Teams.

Attendees:

Welsh Government

Jeremy Miles – Minister for Education & Welsh Language (MfEWL)
Lauren Stamp – Private Secretary
Tracy Johnson – EPS Government Business

WCVA

Ben Lloyd (BL) - Chair
Paul Gaze (PG)
Elin Maher (EM)
Susie Ventris-Field
Katheryn Robson (KR)
Owen Evans (OE)
Gethin Rhys (GR)
Eleanor Jones (EJ)
Ann Wood (AW)
Amy Bainton (AB)
Lowri Jones (LJ)
Catrin James (CJ)
Haddassah Radway (HR)
Katheryn Robson (KR)
David Hagendyk (DH)
David Smith (DS)

Agenda:

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Remarks from the Minister
- 3) Education after the pandemic
- 4) Update on adult learning

Meeting was informed that simultaneous translation was available via telephone; the number was re-issued for attendees' convenience.

Items 1 & 2 Introductions and opening remarks from MfEWL

MfEWL thanked all for their hard work and support and gave a welcoming speech covering a variety of issues including: education following the pandemic, new curriculum, potential changes to the school day/school year, welfare support for staff and learners, inequalities within education, engagement with the third sector and how the third sector supports education.

Item 3 – Education following the pandemic

BL(WCVA) thanked the Minister for his comments and kind remarks and restated the important role that the third sector plays in educational settings.

LJ (WCVA) said that the 3rd sector played an important role outside of the classroom and was keen to know the Minister's views/expectations in terms of the 3rd sector's contribution to Welsh language development and how this fits in with local authorities (LAs) and their plans.

GR (WCVA) thanked the Minister for his kind words on Youth work. GR informed the Minister that he feels youth work across Wales is very patchy; there is plenty of opportunity for the Welsh language to be promoted via this work. The continuation of youth work provides scope to promote the Welsh language throughout communities.

KR (WCVA) thanked the Minister for his comments on lifelong learning and the importance of adult learning. KR stated that voluntary work is invaluable as it opens doors/removes barriers to lifelong learning. She noted that the Minister had made reference to giving people a 2nd chance, she felt that in some cases it was a 3rd or 4th chance and how this links with voluntary agencies is really important. Very often voluntary agencies have contact with those who are hardest to reach. KR also welcomed the Minister's comments on tertiary education.

MfEWL responded that WG is keen to ensure that LAs are not just promoting the provision of Welsh language education in schools but also full filling the needs of the wider community. He stated that LAs must look at the wider context in providing Welsh language education; in a variety of different settings and in all ways. MfEWL reiterated that it was one of his priorities to promote opportunities in all areas/services to increase the use of the Welsh language. The third sector is an important tool in providing Welsh language opportunities. Furthermore, there is a need for innovation as we continue to learn about the impact of Covid on opportunities and the development of the language. Overall, the Welsh language is holding its own and the role of 3rd sector is very important. However, he is aware that there are inconsistencies across local authorities.

MfEWL informed the meeting that there is mechanism in the Bill to provide for further opportunities in Post 19 and adult learning. Waiting on the findings of the WCPP report, and is interested to hear about the use and the range of providers including third sector. MfEWL noted that the infrastructure is in place; the third sector plays an important role in lifelong learning and is often the initial point of engagement for those who are furthest away from education, we need to fully support the sector. Links can be drawn between education outcomes of parents/family and the how these significantly impact on children as well as links between lower levels of education and wellbeing.

EJ (WCVA) noted the very important role of parents during Covid and home schooling. A high number of parents from non Welsh speaking backgrounds found it very challenging teaching children who attend Welsh medium education. EJ asked for reassurance that the additional funding provided would be a long term resource. Provision for digital learning is also important and another way in which parents are

supported. Parents and children are already familiar with community services and clubs such as homework clubs; they are embedded in the community. EJ gave an example of a homework club run by a church. However, it is felt that unfortunately funding tends to be concentrated/directed to new work; funding is required to continue with established services; these services are known, used and trusted by the community they serve.

AW (WCVA) stated that there are huge positive impacts on people's overall wellbeing by volunteering. Volunteers proved to be extremely flexible during the pandemic. There is a high level of trust in 3rd sectors organisation. There are clear links between lifelong learning and volunteering. Public services have opportunities to build partnerships to meet the needs of the community through volunteering. Lifelong learning both formal and informal can be linked to volunteering and provides opportunities to build confidence and skills, which benefits both the individual and community. Moving forward we need to respond to the new challenges facing us such as blended learning and blended work opportunities. We need to balance the funding to ensure that we can continue to work in this way. People have come to expect different things following the pandemic. Money is needed to promote this new way of working and learning; to respond to the changing needs of the community and to tackle inequalities that people face, particularly relating to digital working and digital poverty.

MfEWL reiterated his commitment to eliminate inequality in education. Policy colleagues are reviewing policies to ensure that there is a clear focus on dealing with/eliminating inequality. To help deal with socio-economic disadvantage, stronger engagement with families and communities is essential. Community focussed schools support these communities and stronger relationships need to be forged. We want to develop a model whereby schools are the community hub and provide services and support for all the community; there will definitely be a role for the third sector.

BL(WCVA) responded that he was pleased to hear the Minister's response to promoting the Welsh language and the role of the 3rd sector. He agreed that community focussed schools play an important role in developing and promoting the Welsh language as well as dealing with socio-economic inequalities and disadvantage.

AB (WCVA) highlighted that many 3rd sector services are able to flag issues or concerns at an early stage. Many agencies support schools and are engaged with families and young people in supporting their mental health and overall well-being. She is concerned that numbers of young people accessing these types of services is rapidly growing and asked for an update on how WG will be supporting children and young people with their mental health.

SVF (WCVA) thanked the Minister and raised the importance of active global citizenship; its' important role in supporting young people's mental health and well-being. Children benefit enormously from the opportunity to interact with others from around the world; it makes them feel empowered and develops their understanding of wider world issues. She welcomed the inclusion of such topics in the new

curriculum and emphasised the importance that all children from all backgrounds feel opportunities are for them too and are easily accessible.

CY (WVCA) raised concerns that the end of the financial year was near and wanted assurances that additional funding will be provided to LAs for youth work.

MfEWL stated that the budget is currently being worked on. He recognises the importance of youth work. There is significant funding via the Renew and Reform agenda. He understands the need to re-engage with learners, particularly those who have moved away from learning. There will be an evaluation on how this money has been and is being spent. Furthermore, it will examine how the 3rd sector has been engaged with the process and how well-being outcomes have been delivered. Referrals will also be considered, examining national networks and making sure opportunities are available to all. Discussion took place relating to the "Hwb" and how schools can access volunteering via the Hwb.

WCVA raised some concerns over the Hwb as there have been some issues linking schools and the third sector for the new curriculum. One issue with the current Hwb is the third sector does not have direct access to it to update details etc; it tends to get out of date and thus its effectiveness is reduced

The Minister reminded the meeting that there is a Framework in place which supports a whole school approach; the framework was published in March. Lynne Neagle, Deputy Minister for Mental health and Well-being has set up a task force to achieve a positive cultural environment to support young people to reach their potential; the 3rd sector will have a role. There has been an extra 9million and WG has commissioned universities to look at on line resources to deal with issues such as anxiety for both children and staff; some of the resources will be part of CPD approach.

MfEWL stated that Public Health Wales has been commissioned to produce a toolkit; its' effectiveness will be evaluated. It will support schools to deal with anxiety and mental health issues. Furthermore, the new curriculum will provide more space to deal with young people's anxieties such as climate anxiety. The Minister noted that there is some years before the new curriculum will be rolled out in full and the toolkit could help in the interim.

BL(WCVA) thanked WG for the race equality action plan and noted black history will be included in the new curriculum which was very welcomed. The implementation of a black history engagement officer was also welcomed, who will upskill teachers to talk about black history. BL also feels that work needs to be done with children to build their resilience. Racism has such an impact on well-being of children. Although it is important to learn about their past from school and their communities; it is just as important to build resilience so that they are able to deal with and challenge racism and asked if there are any plans for funding to support specific schemes.

BL(WCVA) asked about Wales being a Nation of Sanctuary work and is particularly interested in right for asylum seekers; they currently do not have access to funding to support their studies such as EMA. BL asked for an update and if the voluntary sector can support this work

MfEWL stated a lot of work being done in this area; he is less cited on resilience building programmes. He will need to get more information. The Minister will also come back on the 2022/23 academic rules for asylum seekers.

MfEWL gave an update on lifelong learning, providing facilities, regulations, WCPP – awaiting report. There is an emphasis on increasing the numbers of adult learners in Wales. Funding will be looked at as well as identifying barriers and the provision of financial support to learners.

Item 4 – Community Learning: (Limited time for discussion)

CR and DS (WCVA) emphasised that community based adult learning is a distinct area with specific complexities and issues with management. Adult community learning is huge and vast. We need to ensure that the National Body supports local provision, we need to maintain the local flavour. Both would welcome on Minister's views on adult learning, the reform of the school day and how adult education fits into the school day.

MfEWL is keen to speak with DS further on community learning and would like to visit the exemplar schools in Cardiff and Pembrokeshire which have excellent provision for adult community based education. The Minister is keen to speak with DS off line and asked him to get in touch.