



WCVA Active Inclusion Fund Evaluation

Fostering the Use of Welsh: Lessons from the WCVA Active Inclusion Fund

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(Summarising Work Conducted Between 2017 - 2022)**

Contents	Page
Section 1: Introduction	3
Section 2: Approach	3
Section 3: Findings	4
Section 4: The Challenge	6
Section 5: Some Facets in Fostering the Use of the Welsh Language	7
Annex 1: Short bibliography:	10

Fostering the Use of Welsh: Lessons from the WCVA Active Inclusion Fund

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. This document summarises learning from an evaluation of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) operated Active Inclusion Fund (AIF) on what works in fostering the use of the Welsh language in programmes supporting people in challenged circumstances.

1.2. AIF provided support for ‘hard to reach’ people in Wales to engage or re-engage in the labour market: people aptly described by a WCVA Economic Inactivity Panel member as the ‘seldom heard’.

1.3. The programme was launched in 2015 and was funded by the European Social Fund with objectives to help participating individuals move out of poverty and achieve improved life outcomes. When launched in 2015, the context was a continued need for action in Wales to help hardest to reach groups towards and into the labour market that were proportionally more numerous than the UK average.

1.3. AIF operated as a flexible and pan Wales element in Welsh employability policy and programmes. It fostered innovation, locally responsive approaches and provided for tailored support for challenged individuals and groups. It combined employability, welfare, and wellbeing objectives by addressing participant soft and life skills alongside the acquisition of specific work-related skills in setting people on a path towards and into employment in recognition that improved lifestyles can be a key determinate in moving towards and into work.

1.4. The theory of change and logic model that underpin AIF were based on funding organisations capable of working with diverse groups and individuals who face challenging circumstances to help them on the route towards, and in some cases into, employment. This included working with communities, groups and individuals who were Welsh speaking. A key requirement was to meet the language preferences of those supported through the programme: primarily whether they wished to use Welsh or English as a first language (but recognising also that the diversity of the Welsh population means that there are also people whose first language is neither Welsh nor English).

Section 2: Approach

2.1. The work was conducted in two main phases in 2017 and 2021 with a review in preparing the final evaluation report in 2022.

2.2. The methodology included:

- a. Leadership by a fluent Welsh speaker with experience in advising and helping Welsh Government and key stakeholders in fostering the use of Welsh.

- b. Interviews with WCVA staff including those engaged in delivering Welsh language standards and policy as well as AIF staff, AIF beneficiaries (bodies funded by AIF to provide support) and participants (people in receipt of support) in 2017 specifically to understand language preferences, together with two in depth observations of AIF beneficiaries and participants working together in Welsh.
- c. A whole (cumulative) AIF 'population' review of available WCVA data on participant language preferences: at the outset of their AIF support, participants are given the opportunity to state their preferred first language via beneficiary bodies providing the support. The data also includes information on wider participant Welsh language capabilities.
- d. A review of the enablers and barriers to the use particularly of Welsh in contexts including relevant literature, revisiting people interviewed in 2017 and interviews with key stakeholders including the Welsh Commissioners Office

2.3. The focus was on areas and projects where Welsh speaking is common and a feature of community life including Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, and Ceredigion, but also included interviews with beneficiaries and participants whose first language was neither Welsh nor English (Arabic and Urdu). More widely, evaluation field work recorded where Welsh speaking was important to participants.

Section 3: Findings

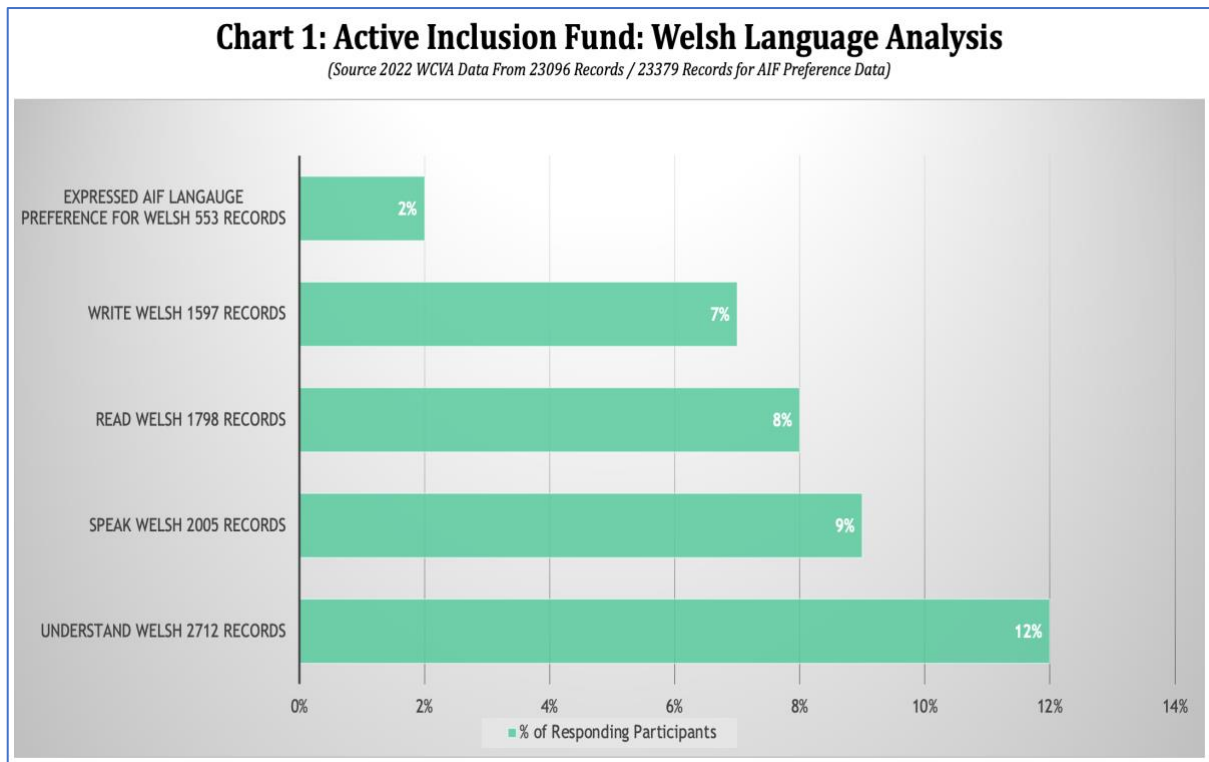
3.1. Taken in aggregate, evaluation findings were that:

- a. A small proportion of participants formally opt to use Welsh as a first language when engaging with AIF: approximately 2% across the lifetime of the programme.
- b. The evaluation engaged directly with 100+ AIF beneficiaries and over 200 participants. Outside specific beneficiary engagement focused on the Welsh language, beneficiaries and participants typically raised no issues with language preference. In Spring 2021 there were six AIF beneficiaries or applicants out of 100+ operating in Welsh, primarily based in Conwy, Gwynedd, and Ynys Mon and WCVA engagement with beneficiaries in Welsh extended to a further 6 who used and communicate in Welsh to some degree.
- c. In practice, AIF beneficiaries working with Welsh speaking participants varied in their approaches. Some worked mainly through the medium of Welsh, whilst others only worked informally in Welsh.
- d. Informal use of Welsh in AIF was much more prevalent than its formal use in documentation and official processes. There was a general sense that beneficiaries and participants were nervous about using Welsh as a written medium, particularly in the specific style of official forms. Reluctance to fill in official forms in Welsh may be partly a due to a perception of the difficult nature of the language used in the form, but was also due to the reluctance of

organisations, even if fluent Welsh speakers, to fill in forms in Welsh. And many participants were cautious about any engagement with ‘officialdom’.

- e. This reflects wider experience of Welsh language usage and a common challenge across the public and third sectors in Wales: Welsh speaking is characteristically - but not geographically uniformly - more prevalent in an informal context than in a formal context. It is also consistent with findings from work such as the Welsh Citizens Advice Bureau Report ‘*Understanding the use and non-use of Welsh language services*’ (2015).
- f. Some beneficiaries reported that they either had too few Welsh speakers to deliver services in Welsh, or that in mixed language groups of participants, the language usually reverted to English. Training was therefore in English and accepted as the norm. One tutor found that she was trusted more because she spoke Welsh, but she was the sole Welsh speaker involved in the project.
- g. AIF beneficiaries operating in strongly Welsh speaking areas viewed speaking Welsh as important given that it is in common use for the organization and as a community language. It can also be a necessity to access some employment opportunities. Using services through the medium of Welsh is not just about a preference: wider research (e.g., the Citizens Advice Report, 2015) identifies that Welsh speakers feel more comfortable expressing themselves in Welsh, feel more confident communicating their needs in Welsh, and think and live their lives in Welsh. This is important for services supporting vulnerable participants.

3.2. Chart 1 below compares the % of participants electing to use Welsh as a first language for AIF support compared to their stated capabilities in using Welsh.



3.3. Two beneficiaries interviewed dealt with participants seeking work whose first languages were Arabic and Urdu. AIF support aimed to improve opportunities for participants in finding employment. Both beneficiaries involved recruited AIF participants from a pool of students in their respective 'English as a Foreign language' courses to provide a pathway towards confidence building and developing skills.

3.4. Although a few beneficiaries reported early concerns about WCVA Welsh speaking capacity, this abated as WCVA worked to ensure that anyone wishing to engage in Welsh could do so and bilingual forms and leaflets were available: something reflected in later evaluation fieldwork.

3.5. WCVA has a wider role in fostering the Welsh language including a memorandum of understanding with the Welsh Language Commissioner to work together to improve its Welsh language provision. In addition to strengthening the use of Welsh organisationally, WCVA encourages the use of Welsh in volunteering and for voluntary organisations to develop volunteering opportunities amongst Welsh speakers including building sector capacity. Examples include introducing 'Cynnig Cymraeg' and engaging with the County Voluntary Councils to support them in developing the use of Welsh including in publishing bilingual websites and working with the local Mentrau Iaith.

Section 4: The Challenge

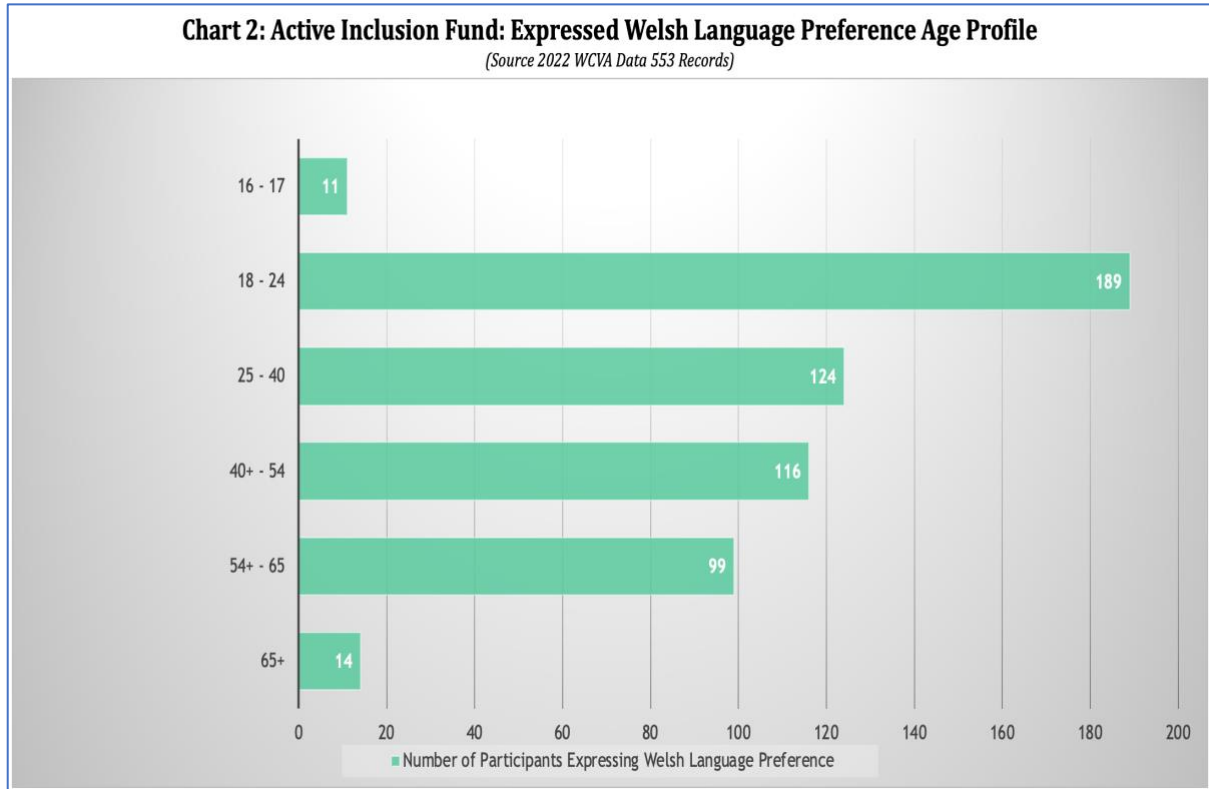
4.1. Overall, AIF experience reflects a wider pattern and gives rise to a general third sector and public sector challenge. Providing formal Welsh language services can be complex and potentially challenging, so seemingly modest demand and take up of formal Welsh language services can lead organisations to question how far to invest resources in further developing them. However, to foster wider use of Welsh requires proactive action to avoid a default to English.

4.2. The challenge is not confined to strongly Welsh speaking areas and communities. Areas in which Welsh speakers constitute a minority may still have a significant percentage of Welsh speakers: for example, in the Cardiff area this is 11% of the population (37,000 people). The percentage of young Welsh speakers is increasing, partly because of the growth in Welsh medium education, so that 24.5% of the 9-15 age range are Welsh speakers, in contrast to circa 19% of the general population (Statistics Wales's analysis of the 2011 Census on the Welsh language). Chart 2 below echoes this age distribution in relation to those AIF participants who elected to use Welsh as their first language.

4.3. Wider research including the Welsh Government's *Welsh language use survey 2013-15* confirms the Citizens' Advice findings and identifies a mix of reasons that lie behind Welsh speakers' reluctance to use existing Welsh language services. In particular:

- a. Structural barriers with a lack of choice or ability to communicate in Welsh.
- b. Behavioural barriers that include a lack of confidence in the quality of Welsh language services through poor past experience in using services, low perceived or real expectations of service quality and fear of mistakes or misunderstandings when dealing in Welsh.

- c. A common concern amongst Welsh speakers (including some evaluation interviewees) that Welsh is ‘too formal’ or too ‘technical’ – or at least that the form of its use can be and is therefore discouraging.



4.4. Welsh Government has embarked on long term and ambitious target to:

- a. Ensure a million Welsh speakers and to double the daily use of Welsh by 2050, as set out in its language strategy, *Cymraeg 2050* (Welsh 2050); and
- b. The Welsh Language Commissioner’s Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021 objective of facilitating wider use of the Welsh language.

4.5. Some of this may be achieved progressively, for example, through the education system, but there is a Wales wide challenge for public services and the third sector. The 2050 target suggests a need for far reaching and collective adaptation to achieve a cultural as well as a practical shift with greater and more proactive use of Welsh as the default and English as a second, fallback, option: at present English is more likely to be the default.

4.6. Also, there is a case for taking a ‘rights-based approach’ to the provision of Welsh language services to emphasise the importance of meeting language preferences.

Section 5: Some Facets in Fostering the Use of the Welsh Language

5.1. The AIF evaluation and wider work in Wales suggest a number of factors that mitigate in favour of fostering the use of Welsh in designing and delivering programmes. These revolve around:

- a. **Organisational culture:** organisations that are fluent and confident in Welsh with sufficient Welsh speakers are better placed to support and encourage, the use of Welsh in informal and formal contexts, including in documentation. Having fluent Welsh speakers also appears to encourage more individuals and organisations to conduct business in Welsh.
- b. **Planning processes and programme design** should assess where Welsh language skills are needed and ensure organizational capability and capacity. Planning and design might involve Welsh medium organisations to assist e.g., Mentrau Iaith Cymru. There are past examples of this including a joint project in Caerffili, where the local Menter helped the local authority to develop the use of the Welsh in children's care.
- c. **Simplicity and clarity in language used in processes, documentation, and forms:** encouraging the use of Welsh may, for example, require reviewing the use of Welsh in documentation, websites, and in translations from English to Welsh etc. to ensure that the use of Welsh is simple and clear and therefore not 'too technical'. An interim AIF evaluation report recommended that 'WCVA consider potential for simplifying AIF forms in Welsh' to help foster the use of the Welsh language. There were constraints in needing to manage the complexities of EU funding requirements, but a post Brexit future offers opportunities for future arrangements to be simplified in English as well as in Welsh by whoever may operate them.
- d. **All specific functions within the administration of programmes that interact with those outside the organization should include fluent Welsh speakers:** this also has advantages in that it provides consistency of expertise across the service (i.e., not 'borrowing' staff who normally deliver a different function specifically to engage in Welsh) and boosts confidence to proactively offer engagement in Welsh. A lack of capability is likely to lead to a default to the use of English. This applies as much to beneficiary bodies and stakeholders providing support as they are to those who administer programmes: AIF experience identifies that establishing a rapport through use of the Welsh language is valuable when working with people who use Welsh as their first language or wish to communicate in Welsh.
- e. **Encouraging and adopting exemplars of best practice**, for example, adopting schemes such as 'Cynnig Cymraeg / Welsh Offer': a charter that clarifies what Welsh language services are available to consumers and users (a number of Welsh third sector organisations have done so, e.g., Mind).
- f. **Supporting staff** to have more confidence in Welsh language abilities and creating opportunities to use the language. It follows that there is value in understanding the Welsh language skills of the organisation, incorporating Welsh language awareness training as need be, and including the Welsh language in any

accessibility policies or statements. This might extend to learners' classes and providing staff training in both Welsh and English, albeit recognising that finding Welsh speaking trainers can be challenging for bespoke or specialist training such as data protection, regulation, the use of social media and project management. The use of interactive online materials is an opportunity to counter this.

- g. **Monitoring service user language preferences** throughout the user journey to ensure that opportunities are afforded for beneficiaries and participants to use Welsh, in a mix and match approach that is appropriate to their needs.

5.2. **IT based aids:** these can help and inform the provision of Welsh language services. The COVID 19 pandemic has driven new online working practices that have changed methods for delivering services and support in Welsh.

5.3. Although a post COVID 19 world is likely to see some aspects of services reverting to pre pandemic approaches, these new online techniques look set to become part of future pattern for ways of working and interacting. They can offer some advantages if applied in appropriate circumstances. For example, translation costs can be reduced, and there is potential to extend the reach to Welsh language audiences. Specific examples include:

- a. The use of Apps such as 'Vocab' which uses a dictionary developed by Canolfan Bedwyr, Bangor University to ensure that websites use simpler and easier to read Welsh.
- b. The use of IT to facilitate an active Welsh language offer, for example, using cookies to remember a language preference, or IP address identification to determine geographical location.
- c. Working with specialists to develop cost effective online training resources and reducing dependence on English language online material.

Annex 1: Short bibliography:

1. <https://llyw.cymru/welsh-language-survey> (2015)
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