

# Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2014-17: Bridgend CBC

March 2014

**UCAC** | yr undeb sy'n diogelu athrawon a darlithwyr Cymru

## Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2014-17: Bridgend CBC

UCAC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation by Bridgend County Borough Council on its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2014-17.

UCAC is a trade union representing teachers, school leaders and lecturers in all education sectors in Wales.

### Section 1: Vision and aims for Welsh-medium education

The vision is clearly expressed in this section.

The only comments we should wish to make are:

- (i) that the third bullet point refers to things that are already requirements, and do not therefore constitute any expansion; in addition, the phrase '*given the opportunity to sit* an externally accredited examination in Welsh at the end of Key Stage 4' seems very weak
- (ii) in the fourth bullet point, we should like to see a commitment not only to 'linguistic equality of opportunity in terms of education' but in addition, linguistic equality of opportunity in terms of any additional support needed by this group of learners

### Section 2: The Action Plan

#### **Outcome 1: More seven-year-old children being taught through the medium of Welsh**

The outline and analysis of the current situation is clear. The targets and actions appear very robust and positive.

We should like to have more information on the source of the data suggesting a "slight dip in the percentage of children aged 7 being taught through the medium of Welsh for the academic years 2014-17"; in another part of the Plan, it is mentioned that there is a likelihood that the presence of the new secondary school will attract "an increasing percentage of learners into the Welsh-medium sector".

We are concerned about the threat to nursery provision, which is currently under review, over the coming years. Any cuts could negatively affect the flow of children into the authority's Welsh-medium primary schools.

We are aware that the Authority is reviewing its policies with regard to free transport. We welcome the declaration that the Authority will continue to comply in full with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008, and we trust that that means it will continue to "promote access to education and training through the medium of Welsh" in accordance with the requirements of that Measure. It must be ensured that there is an entitlement to free transport to a Welsh-medium school beyond the statutory travelling distances (or less, at the Authority's discretion), even if that is not the 'nearest suitable school' by the Measure's definition.

We are glad to see that the Authority accepts that there is great pressure on the two primary schools in the south of the Authority and welcome the fact that the Authority is attempting to deal with the situation. We shall keep an eye on developments following the consultation. In addition, the possibility is mentioned of developing Welsh-medium units in specific areas of the Authority where demand is greatest; it would be useful to have more information about these plans, specifically which areas are involved, and what are the figures in terms of demand on which they are based?

The work outlined in relation to immersion schemes for latecomers appears to be positive and exciting.

#### **Outcome 2: More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school**

Once more, we are happy with the information/analysis of the current position provided, and the measurable targets and specific actions that will lead to improving and strengthening the provision. The only question we have is who will 'explore the reasons' of parents choosing to change the language medium of their children's education from Welsh to English - and how it is intended to go about doing this. UCAC feels strongly that steps should be taken that will mean that a pupil who has had Welsh-medium education up to Key Stage 3 continues to follow a First Language Welsh Learning Programme for GCSE Welsh in Key Stage 4 (and KS5 too, if relevant), even if they choose to transfer to an English-medium school and follow the rest of the subjects through the medium of English.

### **Outcome 3: More learners aged 14-16 studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh**

### **Outcome 4: More learners aged 16-19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh, in schools, colleges and work-based learning**

The current arrangements and the plans for the next few years appear to be well organised and to focus in an appropriate way on the role of the Welsh language in the education systems of the authority and the wider region.

We are aware that the Authority has been consulting on transport issues. We caution that cutting free transport for post-16 learners would have a detrimental effect on the numbers choosing to receive their post-16 education in a Welsh-medium school. Indeed, it could affect the numbers in the entire Welsh-medium sector if it were to appear to parents that there is no convenient progression to post-16 education. That might undermine the whole sector, making it much more difficult for the Authority to achieve its targets in this Plan.

### **Outcome 5: More learners with higher skills in Welsh**

Once again, we generally approve of the content of this section of the Plan.

We note that it needs to be ensured that the System Leader with strategic responsibility for Welsh is familiar to all relevant schools, and that the fostering of a relationship with the relevant staff is essential. If the System Leader, or the Welsh in Education Officers responsible for Welsh First Language, have not yet been appointed, that needs to happen as a matter of urgency, and the links with schools need to be made rapidly.

We urge the Authority to ensure that any training is available through the medium of Welsh for the staff of the Welsh-medium sector, and others wishing it.

**Improvement of Welsh Second Language provision and standards:** It is not clear why the targets set for attaining at least Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014-2016 are lower than the percentage for 2013. Either that indicates a lack of ambition, or there are specific mitigating factors that are not outlined clearly enough in the draft Plan.

No specific figures are noted for the numbers not sitting an externally accredited qualification at the end of Key Stage 4. Nevertheless, it is possible to calculate that the figure for the most recent years is around 18-19.5%. The phrase 'to continue to ensure that every pupil in an English-medium secondary school *is given the opportunity* to sit an external examination in Welsh Second Language by the end of KS4' does not raise confidence that that figure will decrease. It will be necessary to be more robust than merely 'giving the opportunity'.

We believe that a table or some figures have gone missing at the end of column C (Targets) of this section – i.e. targets for increasing the numbers following the full course, and reducing the numbers who do not sit any qualification at all.

### **Outcome 6: Welsh-medium provision for Additional Learning Needs**

No comment.

### **Outcome 7: Workforce planning and continuous professional development**

There is much to be welcomed in this section, including the plans for training to raise the linguistic and methodological skills of educators (teachers and teaching assistants) in all sectors – including by means of Professional Learning Communities. We call upon the Authority to ensure that training is available through the medium of Welsh for educators in the Welsh-medium sector, and beyond.



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