

MANIFESTO FOR THE SENEDD ELECTIONS 2021



CREATING NEW WELSH SPEAKERS: Key priorities for 2021 onwards

RhAG wants to see agreement across all political parties, as Wales aims for a million Welsh speakers, and for a million people to use the language daily, by 2050.

RhAG aims to make Welsh-medium education accessible to all who wish, by ensuring:

- that Welsh medium-education is convenient and within a reasonable distance of families in each community;
- meaningful parity of choice and opportunity;
- that information about Welsh-medium education and the benefits of bilingualism is known to all;
- support for parents to improve their Welsh language or learning skills.
- the status of Welsh-medium schools in the new school categories is protected



INVESTMENT

CAPITAL FUNDING

Establish a dedicated capital funding fund to open new Welsh-medium schools

The Welsh Government needs to significantly expand their capital funding programme to invest in Welsh-medium schools.

The identification of match funding is often a barrier that has hindered many local authorities from taking action before now.

If the Government is serious about seeing a million Welsh speakers by 2050, a programme of rapid growth must be put in place and funding must be ensured to make that a reality.

We therefore call on the Government to increase the revenue and capital funding available to enable the local authorities to take action.



WORKFORCE

Significantly expand the language training programme for primary and secondary teachers who want to turn to Welsh-medium education and support a national network of language centres for latecomers.

It is essential to ensure that there is an adequate flow of teachers available to support Welsh-medium and Welsh-medium education in other schools. This will require collaboration between the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Welsh colleges and universities. Specific targets need to be set as part of training providers' funding agreements to increase the workforce to meet need and demand as the sector expands.

There is a need to ensure that staff have adequate linguistic skills. Although there are some positive plans to provide language training for teachers, these are not part of ambitious targets necessary for the transformation of Welsh-medium education.

The language training programme for primary and secondary teachers who want to turn to Welsh-medium education must therefore be significantly expanded.

Provide specific funding to support the vital work of the Language Centres. In the case of incomers to the countries of Britain, the Government offers free English language lessons. This should happen to in-comers to Wales, with Welsh lessons provided free of charge.

If the Government is serious about seeing a million Welsh speakers by 2050, a programme of rapid growth must be put in place. Safeguarding the funding of the important Language Centres service is an absolutely key element in realising this national policy.



TRANSPORT

Provide a national guarantee that will provide assurance of free transport to the nearest Welsh-medium school from 3-18 years of age.

To ensure parity with English-medium education, Welsh-medium education depends on transport age 3 – 18.

At present many parents of Welsh-medium education are financially penalised because they live a long way from a Welsh-medium school.

Although the Learner Travel Measure (2008) states that local authorities need to provide transport to promote Welsh-medium education, no indispensable link has been made between the provision of transport and Welsh-medium education. This link is essential to the survival of several Welsh-medium schools , particularly in the 16+ sector.

The lack of statutory transport for under-5s hinders the growth of Welsh-medium education in the nursery sector and adversely affects progression.

We call for a national review of current school to home transport policy to guarantee free transport to the nearest Welsh-medium school from 3 - 18 years of age.



PLANNING

PROMOTION

Create a comprehensive national campaign to promote Welsh medium education

We call for a comprehensive national campaign to be held annually, and adequately funded, to share clear messages and information about Welsh-medium education and the benefits of bilingualism to prospective parents and carers. There is a need to develop a central hub in the form of a website together with an App-style digital resource, which will allow parents and carers easy and quick access to information in order to equip them to make informed decisions. Parents need to be given clear information about what Welsh-medium schools are and the skills gained by attending them.

It is essential to distinguish between Welsh medium schools and other types of schools, as only Welsh-medium schools provide complete skills in both languages for all pupils and give them a complete Welsh-speaking environment. Parents need to be supported to learn and use Welsh through an intentional learning programme organised in conjunction with the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

It is also necessary to emphasise the importance of the functions of the other Welsh-speaking partners to make the Welsh language more than a language of Education - Mudiad Meithrin, National Centre for Learning Welsh, the Urdd and the Mentrau Iaith.



LANGUAGE AGREEMENT

Fund an extensive program to support parents to learn Welsh and include a practical commitment to support them on the linguistic journey

Positive support for parents to learn Welsh with their children is needed.

An increasing number of parents are choosing to learn Welsh as their children attend Welsh-medium schools. We call on the new Welsh Government to ensure that there is strong financial support through a Language Agreement or Welsh Language Agreement in order to facilitate courses of all levels that are suitable for parents to learn Welsh and provide a real opportunity for the language to become a home and family language.



DEVELOPING VARIOUS METHODS OF ESTABLISHING WELSH-MEDIUM SCHOOLS

Draw up a national policy to provide clear guidance on methods of establishing Welsh-medium schools

Local authorities need to develop new methods of establishing Welsh-medium schools. To do this, we need a national policy that will provide strong and clear guidance to:

- make it easy for individual schools to convert into Welsh-medium schools;
- require, where there are a number of English-medium schools in an area, one or more to be converted into Welsh-medium schools;
- establish starter classes or seedling schools



WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLANS 2022

Draw up a national policy to provide clear guidance on methods of establishing Welsh-medium schools

WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLANS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

We welcome that the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans will give local authorities over 10 year growth goals. We also welcome the Government's effort to give each county specific targets.

It is essential, however, that adequate revenue and capital funding is made available to local authorities to achieve their goals especially after a challenging period of covid-19.



LEGISLATION

- 1. To draw up a Welsh Medium Education Bill to strengthen the existing legislative infrastructure.**
- 2. Linguistic impact assessments – producing guidance on a statutory basis**
- 3. Establish a specific training programme on legal aspects of Welsh-medium education – the WESPs, transport, school admissions policy, linguistic assessments, urban planning etc**

The Welsh Government has already recognised that the current legislation in relation to Welsh medium education is flawed. Legislation relevant to Welsh medium education is fragmented, inadequate, or enshrined in other laws. In some areas there is guidance but not laws, and in some areas, no legislation exists.

Although a number of the Acts and Guidance identified are supportive of Welsh-medium education, there is no clarity on how to administer or enforce these. The duties of education authorities can be ambiguous, and even if they are found to be acting deficiently or negatively, there are no obvious avenues to hold them to account.

We believe that far-reaching measures need to be taken in order to transform the current landscape.

RhAG recommends drawing up a Welsh medium Education Bill that would cover a range of needs in the field by drawing together all existing legislative strands and providing unambiguous legal clarity in the future. The production of such a legal framework would give Welsh medium education the best conditions to flourish and develop.

It has become clear that too many far-reaching decisions are being made in education in Wales on the basis of totally flawed linguistic assessments. The environmental model is a good model, where there are very detailed laws as to what needs to be assessed in building something and its impact on the environment, and is an example of what is needed in terms of the linguistic context

There are large gaps to be filled in terms of the linguistic context with planning and education being two areas that can have a major impact on the Welsh language.

There needs to be a change in the law – and more robust guidance needs to be created.