

Cross Party Group on Wales International

Tuesday 27th June 2017

Attendees: Rhun ap Iorwerth AM (Chair)
Dr Dai Lloyd AM
Sian Gwenllian AM
Heledd Roberts – Rhun ap Iorwerth AM office
Lauren Kinsey – Lynne Neagle AM office
Ioan Bellin – Simon Thomas AM office
Catrin Davies – Plaid Cymru office
Elen Davies – Cardiff University
Prof Clare Gorrara – Cardiff University
Eira Jepson – PhD student, Cardiff University
Carys Moseley – Presbyterian Church of Wales
Cat Jones – Hub Cymru Africa
Teresa Tinsley – Alcantara Communications
Jenny Scott – British Council
Dr Christopher Lewis – British Council
Alison Cummins – British Council
Dr Walter Ariel Brooks – British Council
Lyndsey Halliday – British Council
Susan Bowen – Positif

Apologies: Suzy Davies AM
Neil Hamilton AM

1. Welcome from the Chair and AGM

The Chair welcomed everyone and started the formal business of the AGM:

- a. ***Election of a Chairperson for the forthcoming year.*** Dr Dai Lloyd AM proposed Rhun ap Iorwerth AM and was seconded by Sian Gwenllian. Thereby Rhun ap Iorwerth AM was elected Chairperson.
- b. ***Reappointment of Secretariat.*** Dai Lloyd AM proposed the British Council and Jenny Scott agreed to continue.
- c. ***Date of next meeting.*** This will be on Tuesday 18th July.

2. Report on the finding of the British Council's third Language Trends Wales report

Teresa Tinsley, one of the report's authors, gave a presentation on the findings of the report with the following observations:

- Between 2002 and 2016 the number of pupils studying a foreign language to GCSE declined by 48%.
- Average take-up of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) is between 11% - 24%, this is because of a squeeze from other subjects and reduced option choices.
- At A-level the numbers have dropped by 44% since 2001 and schools are having to squeeze budgets in order to offer MFL at this level.
- The *Global Futures* initiative has reached 72% of schools who commented favourably on the support they had received and there was a warm welcome for CPD.

- Most MFL departments in schools are small, with 1-2 teachers, and rely heavily on part-time teachers. 34% of MFL teachers in Welsh secondary schools are nationals from other EU countries, which gives a potentially fragile situation post-Brexit.
- 60% said that the way English and Welsh is taught in primary schools is not providing good preparation for MFL.

Ms Tinsley gave the following conclusions:

- The situation and prospects for MFL remain extremely challenging with interventions mitigating the impact of underlying problems rather than achieving systemic change.
- *Global Futures* is having some impact, but the squeeze in the curriculum, exam regime, pressures on funding and Brexit are all having an impact.
- The development of the new National Curriculum for Wales provides an opportunity to develop 'triple language' with the same status as 'triple science'.

The following comments were made by the group:

- Jenny Scott asked about the impact of Brexit on the comments of teachers and wondered if Wales is at a 'tipping point' before teaching languages becomes too expensive. It was reported that many have said that there has been no impact, whilst some have said 'why learn a language', the vote has galvanised teachers to show that languages are important. Ms Tinsley agreed that we are reaching a tipping point in Wales as MFL departments are getting marginalised and once schools feel that they cannot run a course it is a downward spiral.
- Sian Gwenllian AM noted there is a vicious cycle where courses get smaller and more vulnerable and questioned how can we get out of this. Ms Tinsley suggested that we should build on the fact we are a bilingual nation and also promote the triple language option in the new curriculum and have teachers on board. There should be more than one hour a week of language teaching a Key Stage 3 (Estyn recommends two hours per week and should ensure this is adhered to). Due to competition from other subjects, MFL comes low down in comparison.
- Dai Lloyd AM suggested we need a change in mindset of our teachers towards teaching languages and the promotion of languages has to be far more important and languages need to be far more accessible.
- Rhun ap Iorwerth AM questioned if there was a difference in take-up between Welsh medium and English medium schools. It was reported that there are better attitudes towards languages in Welsh medium schools.
- Clare Gorrara suggested that we need to get beyond the transactional language and have a move towards language awareness in schools and an appetite to be interculturally aware. Language learning is also about being open to other cultures.
- Chris Lewis asked about the opportunities of the new curriculum to develop the triple language option. Ms Tinsley said there needs to be key systemic changes for this to happen – getting a richer experience at Key Stage 3; making links between languages, with headteachers and Estyn both playing a part; and using the new curriculum in a dynamic way with a state of urgency for languages.
- Sian Gwenllian AM noted that there is a lot of animosity in the profession towards the new curriculum so was worried about pushing this as a driving force.

3. Conclusion

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and said he would be issuing a statement from the group with the following points:

- Noting that the Welsh Bacc did include MFL but was removed, which needs to be looked at again as it has shut down an avenue for learning.
- There is an opportunity to start to realise ambitions for MFL with the new curriculum.
- Is bilingual plus one any closer to becoming more than an ambition?
- There needs to be some form of positive messaging and action plans in schools. SLTs should be given instruction that they have to have an action plan for languages.