

International Education Programme

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# Welsh Language Project Report

2023-24

# Introduction

The Welsh Language Project (WLP) was established in 1997 with the purpose of promoting and developing the Welsh language in the province of Chubut, Patagonia, Argentina. Each year, British Council aims to send 3 teachers from Wales to spend a full academic year (10 months) working in Patagonia, developing the language in Welsh-speaking communities through formal teaching in classes for young people and adults, in the 3 bilingual schools and via informal social activities. A permanent Teaching Co-ordinator from Wales responsible for the quality of the teaching, is also based in Patagonia. The second aspect of the project is a network of Welsh-speaking tutors who are based in the region, providing support teaching to the bilingual schools in addition to adult teaching. Through Summer scholarships funded by the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Adult Learning courses give Patagonian educators opportunities to visit Wales to attend Welsh language courses, ensuring that the project helps maintain teaching standards and the latest methodologies are in place.

The WLP is managed by British Council in collaboration with the WLP Committee. The committee includes members from the Welsh Government, British Council Wales, the Wales-Argentina Society, Cardiff University School of Welsh, the National Centre for Learning Welsh, and Mudiad Meithrin.



*Pupils and teachers at Ysgol Y Cwm 2023*

## 2022-23 Achievements

- 2 teachers from Wales (August 2023 – December 2023)
- 1 teacher from Wales (March 2024 – December 2024)
- 1 Teacher Co-ordinator in Patagonia
- 1 Welsh for adults/digital teacher in Wales (part time)
- 20+ local tutors in Patagonia
- 9 students passed WJEC exams Mynediad (Entry) level and 5 Sylfaen (Foundation)
- 970 registered learners (schools and adult learners)

## Outgoing teachers 2023

The lack of teaching support in schools and the community in Patagonia from teachers in Wales since the pandemic in 2020 has been a challenge to the project in recent years, despite the huge efforts from the speakers and learners in Chubut to ensure the continuation of the project.

Recruitment for the 22-23 placements opened in October 2022, but due to a disappointing response, this was kept open until the end of April 2023, enabling the recruitment of 2 teachers to take up 5-month teaching placements from August – December 2023. 3 teachers were initially offered positions but one withdrew in May due to personal reasons. The 2 teachers were:



*Thomas and Llinos*

Thomas Door. Nursery – Year 6 teacher at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdare.

Llinos Howells – Retired KS2 Primary teacher and Deputy Head, currently working part time at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tydfil, to improve pupils Welsh Linguistic Skills.

Thomas was primarily based in Ysgol Y Cwm in the Andes teaching Year 1 – 6 for 4 days a week. He also taught Welsh for Adults (Entry to Intermediate) at Canolfan Cymraeg

Esquel 2 days a week. In addition to classroom teaching, Thomas also organised social events including:

- Owain Glyndwr Day, September 2023 – A service at the school where pupils learned about Owain Glyndwr, with performances and songs
- The Mimosa Eisteddfod, October 2023 – Coleg Merthyr and Ysgol y Cwm pupils repeating the story of Welsh and Argentinian history
- A concert with the Welsh band Elidyr Glyn and Ysgol Y Cwm, with performances from Ysgol Y Cwm pupils
- The Mimosa film project, November 2023 – Created 'Stop Motion' with the pupils on the story of the Welsh in Argentina
- Quiz and pub nights for the Welsh speaking community

Through Thomas, links between Ysgol Y Cwm and Welsh schools ((Pen y Dre, Merthyr Tydfil, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda, Rhondda and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar, Aberdare) were also made through videos, emails, and letters.

Llinos was based in Trelew and taught Year 4 in Ysgol Gymraeg y Gaiman in the mornings, and Years 1-6 in Ysgol yr Hendre in the afternoons. She also held adult classes twice a week and spent one morning a week at Coleg Camwy with the secondary school pupils, discussing current issues in Welsh. Through Llinos, the schools were involved in the Mimosa Eisteddfod in Porth Madryn in August 2023, Eisteddfod yr Ifanc in September 2023 and Eisteddfod y Wladfa, October 2023. Social activities included:

- Welsh services at Capel Bethel y Gaiman
- Social nights
- Concerts and Christmas services
- Interview with Aled Hughes on Radio Cymru



Llinos was also able to generate links between her schools and Wales and held a number of zoom sessions with teachers and pupils in Aberyswyth, Ammandford, Brynaman and Merthyr Tydfil.

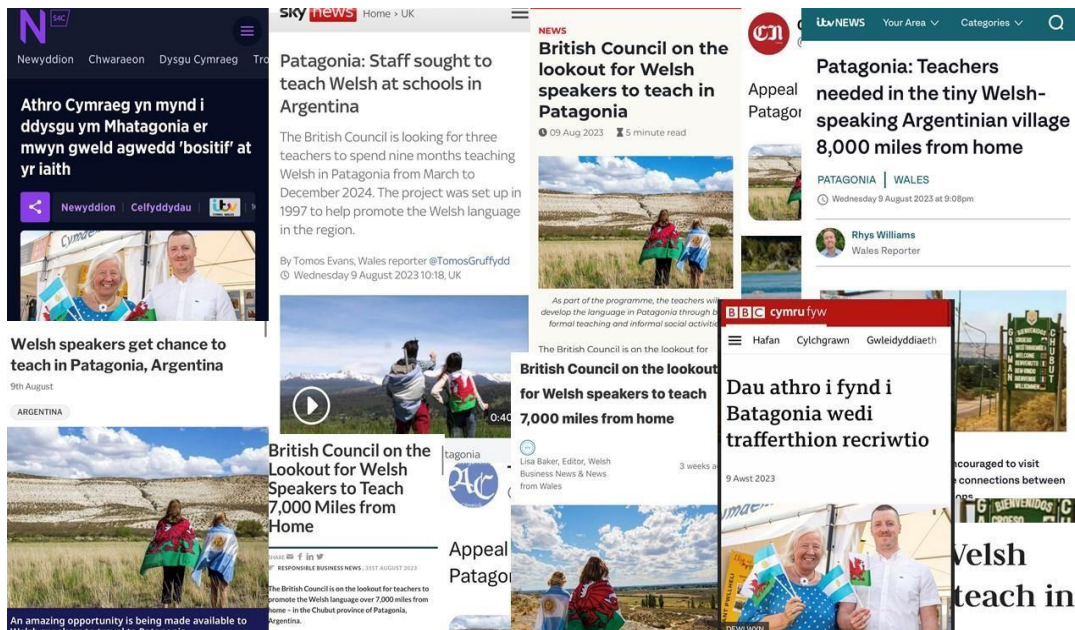
*Llinos and her class in Gaiman*

Due to only recruiting 2 teachers, Llinos was based between the 2 schools in Gaiman and Trelew which proved a challenge with the travel involved. Moving from one school and class to another, resulted in a lack of teaching continuity. It is also difficult for Welsh teachers to start placements mid-year rather than at the beginning of the school year in February, as school timetables are already set and social activities are already underway, so Welsh teachers aren't involved in the planning or design of Welsh lessons.

## Outgoing teachers 2024

Recruitment for the 24-25 placements began in August 2023 to coincide with the National Eisteddfod. Cymdeithas-Cymru Ariannin had a stand at the National Eisteddfod with an exhibition display of Welsh Language Project activities over the past 20 years, including pupils and teachers talking about the value of the scheme.

The Welsh Language Project received unprecedented press and media attention during this period, including items and interviews with the teachers on Sky News, National ITV news, BBC Wales, and press coverage on S4C, Nation Cymru, and many Welsh regional news websites. British Council Wales Director and a teacher from 2020 were interviewed about the scheme live on Radio Cymru and quoted a further 27 times in the press.



7 applications were received by the October deadline, and of these, 4 put forward for interview. 3 teachers were offered placements for 2024 but one subsequently withdrew due to changes in personal circumstances. Along with stakeholders in Argentina, the decision was made to send just the 2 remaining teachers to Patagonia in March 2024, but unfortunately 1 again withdrew after the pre-departure briefing in January 2024. As a result, there is only 1 teacher from Wales in Patagonia for the 24-25 academic year – Rhian Lloyd. Rhian is a former Head at Ysgol Pencarnisiog in Anglesey and currently a Welsh teacher at Ysgol y Graig, Llangefni, who will be taking a leave of absence from school to work in Ysgol Y Cwm in the Andes region. This unfortunately leaves Ysgol y Gaiman and Ysgol Trelew without a Welsh teacher through the project, although Llinos from the 2022 cohort has remained in Patagonia and is now employed directly by Ysgol y Gaiman.

## Pupil/adult learner numbers

An audit of both adult and pupil learners was conducted at the end of December 2023, and there are currently 970 registered learners. This is a considerable reduction on pre-pandemic learners in 2019 which totalled 1411 and reflects the largely adult learners who were lost in the pandemic and have not returned to Welsh Language learning. It is a rise from 623 in 2020 when the last audit was taken, but without 3 teachers per year who have the time to make concerted efforts to attract back the adult learners, the figure is unlikely to increase quickly.

| Place              | Level    | Leaners |
|--------------------|----------|---------|
| Comodoro Rivadavia | Mynediad | 3       |

|                               |            |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Comodoro Rivadavia</b>     | Mynediad   | 5          |
| <b>Esquel</b>                 | Sylfaen    | 7          |
| <b>Esquel</b>                 | Mynediad   | 5          |
| <b>Esquel</b>                 | Mynediad   | 3          |
| <b>Trevelin</b>               | Mynediad   | 6          |
| <b>Trevelin</b>               | Canolradd  | 1          |
| <b>Gaiman</b>                 | Uwch       | 7          |
| <b>Gaiman</b>                 | Canolradd  | 6          |
| <b>Porth Madryn</b>           | Blasu      | 10         |
| <b>Porth Madryn</b>           | Mynediad 1 | 8          |
| <b>Porth Madryn</b>           | Mynediad 2 | 9          |
| <b>Tir Halen</b>              |            | 5          |
| <b>Trevelin - Ysgol y Cwm</b> | Plant      | 150        |
| <b>Gaiman - YGYG</b>          | Plant      | 170        |
| <b>Trelew - Hendre</b>        | Plant      | 150        |
| <b>Bryn Gwyn Ysgol 61</b>     | Plant      | 210        |
| <b>Coleg Camwy</b>            | Arddegau   | 215        |
| <b>Total</b>                  |            | <b>970</b> |

## Scholarship 2023/2024

The incoming scholarship funded by the National Centre for Learning Welsh took place in August, with Eduardo Marinho of Puerto Madryn attending the Canolradd B1 course in Aberystwyth. Working in the museum at Punta Cuevas in Puerto Madryn, Eduardo also spent time in various museums in Wales thanks to links made by members of Cymdeithas Cymru-Ariannin. Eduardo's placement received media attention in Patagonia.

[https://www.elchubut.com.ar/puerto-madryn/2023-7-15-19-51-0-eduardo-marinho-el-guiamadrynense-que-viajo-a-gales-con-una-beca-para-perfeccionar-el-idiomagales#google\\_vignette](https://www.elchubut.com.ar/puerto-madryn/2023-7-15-19-51-0-eduardo-marinho-el-guiamadrynense-que-viajo-a-gales-con-una-beca-para-perfeccionar-el-idiomagales#google_vignette)

The future of the scholarships however is in doubt, with the National Centre unable to fund any further from 2024 onwards, due to focusing on raising a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2025. There is some budget remaining in the current scholarships fund but with higher travel costs and the rising rate of inflation in Argentina, it is likely that only one funded scholarship will be available in 2024, and the scholarships will end in 2025.

## Welsh Language Project Staff

### Marian Brosschot

Throughout 2023-24, Marian has continued to create digital content for the project on her You Tube Channel “Gales Con Marian” (Welsh with Marian) including sharing vlog type videos of Wales for learners to see in a Welsh context, which are able to be used both in and out of the classroom, and also by students outside of the catchment area in Chubut. The digital resources have been able to attract the interest of people who are new to learning Welsh as well as supporting current and advanced students.

The videos created this year include grammatical explanations, Spanish or Welsh songs with subtitles, pronunciation help and comprehensible input ‘vlog’ type videos with Welsh subtitles. These ‘vlogs’ are also a great way to introduce Welsh culture to viewers and encourage participation in the comments section. 5 videos were created from a visit to Patagonia in February 2024 which give viewers in Chubut a chance to see and hear their own area and familiar locations being talked about in Welsh. Many teachers use these videos in class with their learners. Videos are shared on social media and to WhatsApp groups and as lesson material for individuals and groups. The channel (at end of March 2024) just hit 3.5 thousand subscribers (up from 1.5 thousand at the end of March 2023) and is nearing 200 videos, which regularly receive views of up to 3000 viewers.

A particular highlight was a video” Pam mynd i weithio i’r Wladfa?” Why work in Patagonia? The question was asked to learners and Welsh speakers during the Eisteddfod week that come from or live in Patagonia, in order to show people why having teachers from Wales over is so important for them.

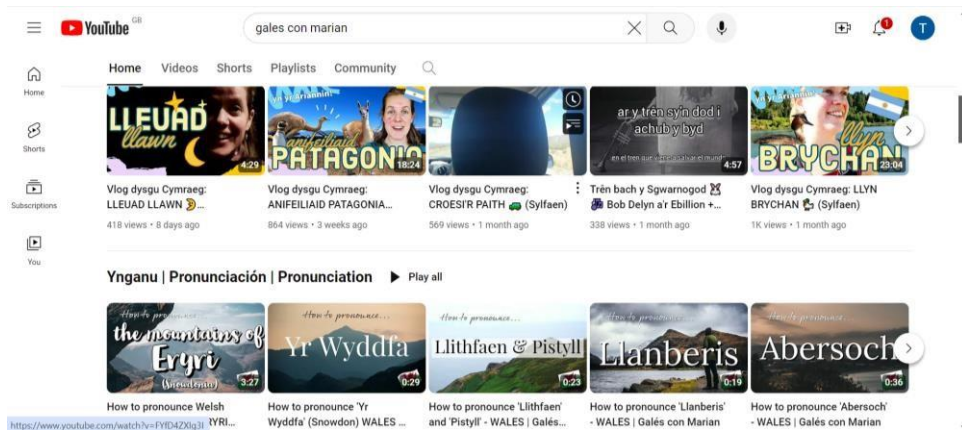
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmqrZ7x4iPw&t=7s>

Marian also contributes regularly to the Menter Patagonia Facebook page which has 1.7 thousand followers, with video and event sharing, and bitesize learning content, and also to the Menter Patagonia Instagram page.

Marian also works on translating the Welsh learning coursebooks into Spanish from Welsh, providing the tutors with a bilingual coursebooks adapted to the local audience in Patagonia, rather than English/Welsh coursebooks for learners in Wales. After translating the Enry and Foundation course books in previous years, the translation of the Canolradd course was completed this year, The translation of the second level coursebook (Sylfaen – A2) is underway and will be completed in the next few months.

Marian also works with British Council Wales to promote and advertise new teaching placements in each summer, attends and presents at pre departure briefings for new teachers, and was instrumental during the Eisteddfod in making arrangements for the press coverage, meeting the new Welsh teachers and assisting Cymdeithas Cymru Ariannin with their stand.





## Report from Clare Vaughan, Teaching Co-ordinator Trevelin, Patagonia Cynllun Dysgu Cymraeg yn y Wladfa 2023

Since the pandemic we have been waiting for things to go back to 'normal' but 2023 showed us that there is no 'normal' to be had anymore. We were unable to fill the 3 posts for the teachers from Wales to come out and work with the communities at the beginning of the academic year in Argentina, which was a blow to the schools in particular, and so had to readvertise in the hope of employing teachers for the second half of the year. 2 were employed in the 'Dyffryn' (the eastern part of the province of Chubut) and 1 for the Andes in the west. Whilst the communities are grateful for any support, short or long-term, and received the teachers with open arms, it is very difficult to come into a year that is more than 50% over and when timetables have been set since February and there are so many activities like eisteddfodau and concerts and visits and school trips to interrupt the classroom learning. These events are of great importance to the communities and are vital in preserving the cultural aspects of the language: Eisteddfod Porth Madryn (August), Eisteddfod yr Ifanc (the youth eisteddfod in September), Eisteddfod Chubut (the eisteddfod for the whole province in October), the Trevelin birthday celebrations (November) and the end of classes in December. In order to get the most from the experience in the community it is important to have teachers present who will accompany the learners in all aspects of the language and culture during the whole year.



## *Performances from the Eisteddfod Mimosa, Porth Madryn*

When teachers come for only 4 months their experience is usually very different to those who invest almost a whole year in teaching in Patagonia. It takes time to get to know people, even when they are outgoing and sociable as the Argentinians! It takes time to get to know the learners and really understand their needs. It takes time to feel confident in organising social events where the language can be used in a more informal situation. We ask a lot from the teachers, but it is important that all these elements of language learning and practice are available. Many of our ex-learners now work as tutors or teachers or classroom assistants and they do not have time to study formally in the classroom and need these social opportunities to use the language in a real situation. However we are very proud of their efforts and in the absence of teachers from Wales these local teachers are keeping the schools going.

The social element of the project has been weakened in recent years since the Menter Iaith funding for social events has disappeared: curry nights and 'Cawl a Chân' (Soup and a Song) have been very popular in the past even drawing in people who do not attend regular classes but there has to be funding in order for the teacher to buy the ingredients, print tickets and posters to promote the evening. It is ironic that whilst there is no funding for this social events side of the project, the Facebook page Menter Patagonia has more than 1600 members from around the world. One of the responsibilities of the teachers is to maintain the momentum of this page but again with only 16 weeks to do this it is not easy to fit every task in. A further source of funding needs to be sought in order to recuperate this part of the teachers' roles as without a boost there is a danger that the language will stay within the walls of the classroom.

Something that was lost during the pandemic and we have seen no signs of its reintegration was the annual visit by students from Wales facilitated by the Urdd youth movement. This visit was an opportunity for young people learning the language to meet with their peers and exchange culture and share experiences. One of the lessons from this cultural exchange was the amazement from the Welsh students at the efforts their Argentinian counterparts were putting in to learning the language and this message reached Wales and perhaps motivated the Welsh students to put even more effort in to maintaining the language in its homeland.



*Both sides of a Zoom call between Ysgol Y Gaiman, Patagonia and Ysgol Pwll Coch, Cardiff*

The education which the pupils receive is holistic in comparison to the state education and so they can contribute to concerts and eisteddfodau with music and dance which celebrate the culture of the Welsh settlers. When visitors from around the world, but Wales in particular, come to the Wladfa, they are given a special welcome by pupils and adults who live in a more isolated part of the world and who are excited to meet with them.

Another initiative, mainly initiated by the teachers from Wales, is the connecting of schools from Patagonia with schools in Wales; it is easier for teachers from Wales to do this as they usually have particular links with individual schools and know who to contact. It would be beneficial for the education of the pupils to have this formalised a little and that the three primary schools can participate in such a project.



Ysgol Gymraeg y Gaiman, with the encouragement of the teachers from Wales, took part in the Urdd Eisteddfod by participating online and in some competitions have reached the finals which are held in May. The challenge is managing the time difference which is 4 hours between Wales and Argentina, but it shows what is possible when there is strong guidance from teachers from Wales.



*Pupils from Ysgol y Gaiman competing online in the Urdd Eisteddfod*

Gaiman is in a fortunate position to have 2 teachers from Wales working with them at the moment. Last year they had 2 periods of volunteers and Ysgol y Cwm welcomed a graduate student to work with them for a month. These experiences have a positive impact on the students and give a boost to the children and staff.

There has always been a challenge when the pupils leave the 3 primary schools as they are accustomed to one form of education and it has been difficult for them to adapt at times to the state system, but what is encouraging is that the grand majority wish to continue with their Welsh: in Gaiman and Trelew Coleg Camwy has been teaching smaller groups of students who have had a bilingual education and in Trevelin students have been using some of their spare time when not in school to attend extra Welsh classes. From 2024 Ysgol y Cwm will open a secondary school and whilst not truly bilingual (i.e. half the curriculum in Spanish, half in Welsh) students will have 6 hours of Welsh during the week.

In addition to the many tourists who visit Patagonia and are given a warm welcome, some of the other visitors to Y Wladfa in 2023 included-

- Staff and students from Coleg Merthyr who worked on a project with Ysgol y Cwm pupils.
- Staff from Coleg Dewi Sant who were fact-finding for a visit in 2024.
- 3 members of staff from Mudiad Meithrin who came to work alongside our local teachers to see where we can build links and share best practice. 3 of our teachers

will be travelling to Cymru to observe and take part in a couple of weeks of activities including the Urdd Eisteddfod in 2024. <https://meithrin.cymru/news/vikki-thomas-photos-patagonia-trip-2023/?lang=en>

- Students from Cardiff University who spent 2 weeks in the Dyffryn and 2 in the Andes volunteering in the schools.
- Students from Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen visited Gaiman and the Dyffryn with the hope of organising an exchange in the future.



*Students from Ysgol Syr Owen meet young pupils from Ysgol y Gaiman*

One important element of the work of the project is the fact that students have the possibility to sit the WJEC Cymraeg i Oedolion exams and we encourage students to participate as it is a challenge which gives them an incentive to continue improving their language skills, the possibility to sit an internationally recognised exam and for the Project to gain status in a country where international exams are an important element in language learning and marking achievement. In 2023 9 students passed Mynediad (Entry) level and 5 Sylfaen (Foundation) and we are very proud that they are suitably skilled to have success at the same standard as students in Wales.

If we consider the work that is being done mainly by local tutors and teachers, who have themselves benefited from the project, it is incredible how much of an impact it has had on the communities and the students who have participated in its classes. We are facing an incredibly hard challenge as we go into 2024 as we consider the financial constraints on both sides of the Atlantic, the problem of recruiting teachers, the age range of our stalwarts in the schools and all against a real reduction in funding.

The local communities plead with us for their own teacher/tutor from Wales and show a real necessity in having access to the best practice in Wales to improve what they are already doing. The schools are still young and still need guidance as regards bilingual education and having a teacher from Wales is fundamental to the continuing success of the project, without mentioning the need to attract more adult learners. What is possible is being done at the moment with significant sacrifice from various areas of the community, what could be possible is a dream as we struggle to make ends meet. Only an increase in budget and success in recruiting suitable teachers from Wales will enable the work of the project to firstly remain sustainable, and secondly to continue growing.

Clare Vaughan, Trevelin



*Staff and Nursery Class at Ysgol y Hendre*