

# Welsh Language

#### Introduction

Successive censuses in the twentieth century recorded decreasing numbers of Welsh speakers, though by the latter end of the century legislation and policies had been put in place to arrest this decline. *The Welsh Language Act 1993* sets out the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality. Recent figures show an increase in the number of Welsh speakers:

- 21.7 per cent (611,000 people) of all those aged 3 and over could speak Welsh in 2004, compared to 20.8 per cent in the 2001 Census, 18.7 per cent in 1991 and 19.0 per cent in 1981.
- Of those who could speak Welsh, 62 per cent spoke Welsh daily.
- 37.0 per cent of children between 3 and 15 years old in Wales could speak Welsh".

The Welsh Language Board was established under the *Welsh Language Act 1993* to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. It has statutory powers to require public bodies to prepare Language Schemes detailing how they will treat Welsh and English equally in providing services to the public. The Board is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport appoints members to the Board.

# Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

"Welsh language" is Field 20 of Schedule 5 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. This means that the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers over Welsh language matters through Legislative Competence Orders.

The following secondary legislation responsibilities of the Second Assembly will transfer to Welsh Ministers in the Third Assembly:

- The Welsh language.
- All activities of the Welsh Language Board, including determination of disputes over and appeals against its decisions.
- The prescription of Welsh-language equivalents of statutory terms and forms.

The outgoing Welsh Assembly Government announced its intention to merge the Welsh Language Board with itself and create a Dyfarnydd to undertake the Board's regulatory role in respect of Welsh language schemes. This would require the passing of a Legislative Competence Order and an Assembly Measure. Other political parties have also indicated that they would wish to pass Measures relating to the Welsh language.

Matters reserved to the UK Government, but which are related to the portfolio include:

• The media and broadcasting, including broadcasting in the Welsh language and the activities of Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C).

### **EU policy**

- The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages<sup>III</sup> came into force in the UK in July 2001.
- The EU's Framework Strategy for Multilingualism<sup>iv</sup> was published in December 2005.

## Key Welsh Government documents and action plans from the Second Assembly:

- *laith Pawb A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales*<sup>v</sup> is the Welsh Assembly Government's Welsh language strategy.
- Economic Development and the Welsh language A Programme of Action<sup>vi</sup> brings together aspects of economic development and language development.

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## Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

The Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee's legacy paper<sup>vii</sup> highlighted the following issues relating to the Welsh Language for the attention of the Third Assembly:

- The future handling of Welsh language policy, including the future possible merger of the Welsh Language Board with the Welsh Assembly Government.
- Legislation relating to the establishment of a Dyfarnydd/Welsh Language Ombudsman.
- Welsh medium education (especially post 16).
- Inclusion of wider language use questions in the 2011 Census.
- Minority languages within policy areas of the EU and the possibility of Welsh being used in official proceedings within the EU institutions.

#### **Useful Links**

- Welsh Assembly Government website covering the Welsh Language: http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/welsh\_language/?lang=en
- Welsh Language Board: http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/
- Fforwm laith was created to bring together bodies and organisations with responsibility for the Welsh language:
  - http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/welsh\_language/fforwm\_iaith/?lang=en

#### **Further information**

For further information on any aspect of Welsh language, please contact Neil Cox, Members' Research Service (Neil.Cox@wales.gsi.gov.uk), 029 2089 8007

http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/cynnwys.php?pID=109&langID=2&nID=2122

Office for National Statistics, 2001 Census:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=10920

http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/cynnwys.php?cID=&pID=109&nID=173&langID=2

Council of Europe, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal\_Affairs/Local\_and\_regional\_Democracy/Regional\_or\_Minority\_languages/

European Union, Framework Strategy for Multilingualism

http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11084.htm

\* Welsh Assembly Government, 27 November 2002, laith Pawb - A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales

http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/strategypublications/iaithpawbactionplan/?lang=en

Welsh Assembly Government, September 2004, Economic Development and the Welsh language - A Programme of Action <a href="http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038231141/4038211255/language-economy-e.pdf?lang=cy">http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038231141/4038211255/language-economy-e.pdf?lang=cy</a>

Welsh Language Act 1993 (Chapter 38), s.5(2)

Welsh Language Board, May 2006, 2004 Welsh Language Use Survey Report

<sup>14</sup> March 2007, Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee, CWLS (2) 04-07 (p3)