

# Eisteddfod session notes

7 August 2024

## Challenges

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It was noted that one of the main challenges is distinguishing between Welsh as a school language and Welsh as a language for life outside of school. Mention was made of the tendency for people to stop using their Welsh after leaving school as they believe "my Welsh isn't good enough". Some speakers felt a sense of vulnerability as they were afraid of making mistakes. A comparison was made to going to France, where there is no fear of attempting to speak French.

An audience member asked, when does someone stop being a "learner"?

Using "Wenglish" is totally fine. It was said that mutating incorrectly doesn't matter. One challenge in this matter is perhaps a general attitude in the Valleys of "I'm not good enough". Another contributor noted that these points ring true and that lack of confidence is a problem - "one of our biggest challenges". As a result, there is a shortage of Welsh speakers for Welsh-medium education.

The question was asked whether children have the opportunity to speak Welsh. That is, opportunities outside the school, especially when so many leave Welsh-medium education with "tidy Welsh".

People still see value in being able to speak Welsh as they send their children to Welsh-medium schools, despite not speaking it themselves, or being able to speak Welsh to their children.

## Funding and expectations

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A point of discussion was that funding is provided to support activities, but not the administrative side, and that funding is a challenge in terms of scale and also in terms of various qualifications and different investment. There are implications for this because staff need to be found to work in care clubs – it is necessary to ensure that the employees have the right qualifications... care clubs and summer clubs require different qualifications, for example. One said there was a "huge shortage" of Welsh-speaking staff, and another referred to a shortage of opportunities to work in Welsh.

The need for more bilingual events was noted – parents' pride in seeing their children attend and participate in events of this kind is obvious – but one weekend a year is not enough. Things must go beyond being a "token gesture". Creating extracurricular opportunities was noted as being extremely important.



The small size of the core grant for mentrau iaith was mentioned, along with the fact that it has not increased for a decade, but it is still important. As a result, staff retention is a challenge.

The question was asked as to how a new community of speakers could be created. One response to this suggested that experiences of recent years leading up to the Eisteddfod had provided many opportunities to attend Welsh language events. For example, it was noted that one of the choirs established to compete in the Eisteddfod is going to carry on, which demonstrates a positive side of the Eisteddfod's peripatetic nature. It was also noted that the Eisteddfod had inspired people to go back to Welsh lessons. It has been more bilingual and more welcoming.

Local committees' contributions to resources was also discussed - e.g. in continuing to fundraise etc.

## **Opportunities**

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A point was raised that volunteering in the Welsh language provides an opportunity to use Welsh in a more "casual" way. It was asked how charities can help to provide more opportunities like this in the Welsh language.

It was noted that the mentrau iaith have a central role in promoting opportunities, but they are unable to do everything due to scarce resources. However, there was mention of an opportunity to capitalise on the Eisteddfod being held locally - many small, local committees had been set up to raise money. However, it is often the same people on these committees and other, similar local committees, so the challenge is to recruit new people. As part of this, new speakers need to be welcomed, and the importance of keeping a balance between fluent speakers and new speakers was discussed.

The need to continue holding events was mentioned, to ensure that the Welsh language is visible and fun.

The need for job opportunities was noted, as was the opportunity to speak Welsh in the workplace. You have to seek out opportunities, but it is difficult.

One new speaker discussed S4C as a solution. The learner said that they did not go to classes but that they learned by watching S4C. They do this by "devouring a new drama in one bite", and this is their main source of learning.

Partnership working is also key. One example mentioned was a new group that provides play opportunities for babies and parents through the medium of Welsh with a recognised local childcare company. The partnership's success was down to trust in the local company. It was proposed that such a model needs to be considered in other areas in order to normalise the Welsh language and ensure that it is not seen as something for other people.

## **Learning lessons from previous Eisteddfodau**

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Securing new speakers is important, and making Welsh easier to learn is part of that. There is a need to increase opportunities to attend things such as the theatre and for cultural/artistic organisations to welcome learners into new places.

In the 1970s, it was noted that sending learners to Welsh-medium education helped with social mobility out of the Valleys. There was an increase in the language in positions of authority. We now need to find an incentive that has contemporary significance for the Welsh language and what it means.

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## **New speakers**

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One of the things discussed was how to normalise imperfect Welsh, and the duty we all have to do this and to take pride in it. "The language deserves a lot more support". Mudiad Meithrin was mentioned regarding the "ti a fi" sessions as a successful model of normalising the Welsh language. The importance of making Welsh easier to use was noted, especially in cultural areas (theatre etc.) and that they do more to welcome learners.

"Wenglish is the language of the Valleys".