

# History of the Welsh Language

*The Welsh language – Cymraeg – is generally believed to be the second oldest existing language in Europe, after Basque, with its origins going back at least 3000 years. At its height it was spoken by people in Wales, western areas of England, Cumbria (Lake District) and the south of Scotland; Edinburgh and Glasgow were Welsh-speaking areas.*



11-18) in 1956. Further schools opened in the 1960's, at a time of cultural radicalism and activism, and they grew rapidly in the 1970's and 1980's. As of 2021 there are 44,762 senior school students learning solely through Welsh. This is 23% of that age range.

In 2007, the Welsh Government published its Welsh-medium education strategy, aimed at improving the teaching and learning of the language throughout the country. It drew on an earlier vision to create a truly bilingual Wales. As a result, all children attending school in Wales now learn Welsh from the ages of 7 to 16, and around a quarter of primary school pupils are taught predominantly through the medium of Welsh.



Wales was conquered by England in 1282 and annexed in 1536. From the 1536 Act of Union onwards, Welsh was outlawed in administration, and discouraged as a means of communication. The masses, however, continued to speak Welsh in their everyday lives. In 1847 a report, known as the *Treachery of the Blue Books*, was written by three English lawyers. It claimed that the Welsh language was a drawback to education and noted that the lives of the people could only be improved if they spoke English. The "Welsh Not" was introduced, which forced Welsh children to speak English at school. If they did not, they would be physically punished. However, once again, people kept on speaking their indigenous language.

## Welsh-medium Education

After a long political campaign to establish schools that taught through the medium of Welsh, Ysgol Glan Clwyd became the first Welsh-medium Secondary School (age

## Pre-School Education

*Mudiad Meithrin* (Nursery Movement) has established play groups and nurseries throughout Wales which allow children to learn Welsh through immersion (learning the language through play). There are currently around 13,000 children in *Mudiad Meithrin* playgroups and nurseries.

*Cynllun Cymraeg i'r Teulu* (Welsh for the Family) is a scheme that supports non-Welsh speaking parents/carers who have pre-school children by introducing simple vocabulary, songs, and stories as well as help with pronunciation. There is also *Cam wrth Gam* (Step by Step). This is a Welsh course that has been prepared specifically for Welsh learners. The course has been designed on two levels, beginner and intermediate, and offers the language needed to work with young children.

### Primary Education

There are five main types of primary school in Wales, differentiated by their approach to the Welsh language:



1. *Welsh-medium primary schools: Welsh is the main language of the curriculum and the school. All teaching in the Foundation Stage (3-7 years), and 70 per cent of the teaching in Key stage 2 (7-11 years old) is in Welsh.*
2. *Dual stream primary schools: Welsh-medium and English-medium teaching exist side by side, and children are placed in either the English or the Welsh stream, depending on parental choice.*
3. *Traditional primary schools: Teaching is mainly in Welsh in the Foundation Stage (3-7 years old). In Key Stage 2 (7-11 years old), both English and Welsh are used, but with a greater emphasis on Welsh (50 to 70 per cent of teaching).*
4. *Predominantly English-medium primary schools but with significant use of Welsh: Welsh and English are used, but English is the predominant language. Welsh is used 20 to 50 per cent of the time.*
5. *Predominantly English-medium primary schools: English is the main language, with Welsh taught as a second language.*

In Welsh-medium schools, staff and children communicate in Welsh both inside and outside the classroom. Welsh and English are used to communicate with parents.

There are around 450 Welsh-medium primary schools in Wales, and 25 per cent of children are taught in Welsh as their main language.

### Secondary School

When children reach the age of 11 they go to either Welsh medium secondary schools or English medium secondary schools. There are 49 senior schools teaching 35,000 students entirely in Welsh.

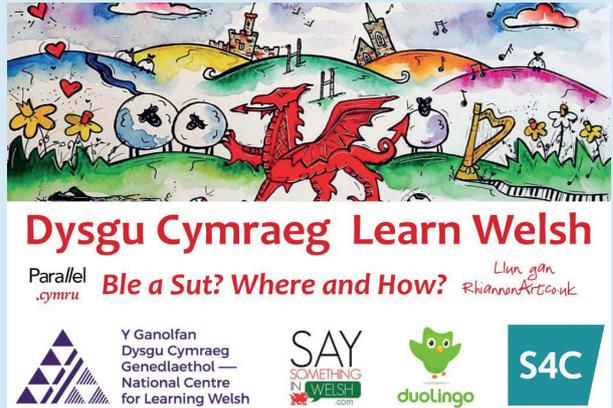
### Post-16 and Higher Education

In the age range of 16-18, known as Further Education in Wales, the Welsh Government launched a Welsh-medium Action Plan in 2019. This also covers people undertaking technical and scientific apprenticeships and training.

When it comes to higher education, Welsh Universities are bilingual establishments. Students can submit work and undertake examinations in Welsh, even if they are on English language taught courses. Around 10% of academics are fluent in Welsh, with another 10% having a good level of understanding, or some knowledge of the language.

### The Future

Welsh is currently used on a daily basis by about 20% adults and 37% of children. The Annual Population Survey (2019) reported that 28.4% of people aged three and over were able to speak Welsh. This figure equates to 857,600



people out of a population for Wales of 3.1 million. The Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 strategy recognises education and training as the primary means of achieving the target of one million speakers. It also sets ambitious targets for increasing the numbers of teachers who teach Welsh as a subject across all sectors of education.



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