



**Comments on
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Welsh Education Strategic Plan 2022 – 2031**

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Parents for Welsh Medium Education is an organization that represents parents with children in Welsh medium schools.

RhAG as an organization aims to support the development of Welsh-medium education throughout Wales.

RhAG appreciates the opportunity to contribute these comments as part of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's preparation of the Welsh Education Strategic Plan 2022 – 2031.

Comments on Rhondda Cynon Taf's Welsh Education Strategic Plan

<p>Vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We broadly welcome the vision statement. Ensuring excellent quality in schools for all learners through English and Welsh is commendable and this availability is an important factor. • What we don't see in the vision are the top-line targets on how to achieve this vision - the lack of targets makes the commentary less meaningful. • It would be helpful to see how the increase of between 720 and 825 learners in year one in Welsh medium education will be achieved broadly over the 10 years. • A question we have is why does Rhondda Cynon Taf not want to set the highest target to achieve? If we are to achieve one million Welsh speakers why not aim for the highest percentage of the target range? Welsh Government makes clear their expectation that counties aim to exceed targets wherever possible. • The vision states that there are many surplus places within Welsh medium education in primary and secondary schools. Where's the breakdown of this? Are there obvious reasons for this? What measures has the authority taken to promote Welsh medium education in these schools' areas? It is essential with this new scheme in place that micro-promotion takes place to address these surplus places. • We appreciate that there are many strategies and policies and a local development plan that underpin this document. It would be helpful if these strategies could be included and named in this document to ensure transparency and provide a clear context for future monitoring and planning. It is essential to confirm the status of this Plan as an overarching strategic document, which spans many areas, and is an integral part of the Council's corporate service. • Furthermore, a much closer relationship is needed between the WESPs, Welsh Language Standard No. 145 and the Language Strategy: A Million Welsh Speakers. Specific targets need to be set for increasing the number of language speakers: the education sector is clearly the main engine for creating the language speakers. i.e. populated areas with the least density of Welsh speakers will have to contribute most to meeting the target. We would encourage clearer cross-referencing between this Scheme and RCT's Five Year Language Strategy. • With regard to the Welsh Education Forum, RhAG would recommend that all clusters are represented.
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Outcome 1

- We appreciate the effort to include a great deal of information and narrative about the current situation within this Outcome.
- Unfortunately the narrative is too long and too wordy and there is not enough detail on actual projects and geographical mapping of current provision to set a baseline for the plan.
- We would expect a detailed mapping exercise of provision across the County, identifying current provision and identifying gaps. The next step would then be to map out how these gaps will be filled.
- County-wide data masks deficiencies in local provision and the LA needs to be much more transparent in this regard if true planning is to reach all areas and families with a balanced choice.
- At present it is not clear what the Welsh medium pre-school provision is and how close it is to the families of each area of the County.
- The concept of '15 minute communities' is fast becoming an effective way of planning local services. This approach should be applied to Outcome one to ensure that adequate pre-school provision is available through the medium of Welsh and close to families in every community across the LA.
- There is also a need to ensure that public transport is readily available for areas beyond easy walking distance for these provisions.
- We need to see clear plans to link health to pre-school visits. Identifying that it **could** be included is not enough. There should be clear plans outlined in this Outcome to promote Welsh medium education as part of the Wellbeing and Resilience Service launched in October 2020.
- To achieve Welsh Government's aim of creating a million Welsh speakers, we must be ambitious and proactive. It is noted that there will be improved campaigns and marketing methods. What will these campaigns and approaches be and why are they not being implemented now? There is a lack of detail in how the Council wants to reach new parents and market Welsh medium education.
- It is appropriate to note that RCT was one of the first counties to prepare and publish a booklet, 'Being bilingual', which promoted Welsh medium education. Each LA has since published a similar booklet.
- This Plan needs to outline innovative ways to build on the success of that leaflet, by developing the brand and presence of Welsh medium education and the benefits of bilingualism, e.g. through videos, illustrations and graphics, online presence and social media platforms, as part of a co-ordinated campaign covering all provision and highlighting a clear pathway from Early Years to Further Education provision within the LA's boundaries.
- Each LA needs to take ownership of the 'story of Welsh medium education' in their local area, and to convey that through the experiences of their pupils and their families, in order to pass the message on to the next generation of families making decisions about their education children. There is an urgent need for a national campaign, led by Welsh Government, but as part of that effort, the work done on the ground in delivering and communicating these messages is just as important. We note that the new Rhondda Cynon Taf Families (RCT) website is about to be launched, what are the possibilities here?
- The only target we see within this Outcome is a 65% increase in the

	<p>number of places available. Welsh Government target sets out numbers that are</p>
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	<p>attending as a target not number of places. How and where will this 65% take place, then? This needs to be more specific.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Outcome states "The Council's aim is to provide at least 25% of all Flying Start Programme childcare places through the medium of Welsh." Where will these provisions be? • Furthermore, we note that the target of 25% would fall short of this Plan's lifetime growth projections for both Outcomes 1 and 2. The target for increasing the Flying Start Programme's Welsh medium care places needs to be aligned with the growth target for Outcomes 1 and 2. Indeed, we would urge the LA to take decisive action to move to a situation where 50% of the provision is available through the medium of Welsh, as this would provide real equality of opportunity for families across the County. • At this stage, we note that the onus is on the parent/guardian to request a Welsh medium childcare place on the Flying Start Programme. We would strongly press for a fundamental policy change here, with a move towards a proactive offer regarding the language medium of provision as parents make inquiries. • We further note that parents/guardians often turn down the childcare offer because an English medium childcare setting is closer to home. The area therefore - rather than their original language of choice - informs their decision. This simply sums up and underlines the fundamental importance of the need to open childcare / Early Years provision - and Welsh medium schools - in new communities. Expanding existing provision does not necessarily remove the obstacles that continue to make Welsh medium education an impossible choice for so many families. This Plan must acknowledge and respond to that challenge in a meaningful way. • Where is the information on the possible areas of action of the new Childcare Feasibility Assessment? The Outcome only identifies comments such as "a number of strengths and weaknesses" or "achievement of official progress". But where is the specific information about Welsh language provision? There is a need to be more specific and focus on improving Welsh language provision. • There are statements about "The Council will" but not enough information about "how this will happen." • The document's language needs to be changed to be more robust and definite: We will... by... Here is how we will do this ... with funding from ... in partnership with... • How is the Table on page 14 estimated?
<p>Outcome 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is much repetition of the vision in this Outcome. The Outcome should be extending the comments of the vision rather than repeating them. • The surplus places mapping exercise (page 17) needs to be included in this document to provide clarity and a baseline for the plan. • The Council aims to ensure that 720 learners receive Welsh medium education in year 1 by the year 2032, which is an increase of approximately 10% from the current position. What is very disappointing is that there is no mention of opening new schools. Where new schools are established, they attract. It is good to add capacity to existing schools but we need a missionary spirit and entrepreneurship to reach the goal of 720 learners, and more.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 5 projects on page 17 that will contribute to increasing numbers. Having a trajectory showing the contribution of each scheme and over the life of this plan would be useful to see exactly how and when this progress will take place. • Again, no geographical analysis of existing provision is included to ensure that every area of the County is within a reasonable distance of Welsh medium education. This needs to be seen in the document from the start. • This document is a public document that will set out Rhondda Cynon Taf's plan for strengthening and extending Welsh medium education over the next decade. It is an important document that will be responsible for guiding development. It is essential that it is comprehensive, transparent and ambitious for all families across the County. This Outcome anchors the whole scheme. At present not enough importance has been given to this Outcome. There are not enough details on HOW and WHERE these developments will take place. • It is good to see that there are immersion plans for offering a second point of entry into Welsh medium education, but the information is very vague. Robust plans and a marketing programme are required. • There is a lack of any reference in this Plan to the RCT Local Development Plan. The RCT Local Development Plan proposed to build 14,385 homes between 2006 and 2021, an average of about 959 per year. What is the latest progress on this? What will be included in the revised LDP for the next period? As such, it is essential that there is clear and obvious cross-referencing between the WESP and the LDP, to show what work has been done to assess the adequacy of Welsh medium places in those areas using recent evidence of proposed housing sites, as well as the LA's responsibilities in stimulating demand for Welsh medium education. • The RCT SPG has historically based the formula on 80% of new pupils entering English medium education and 20% into Welsh medium education. We call on the Council not to follow their previous strategy based on past demand patterns of 20% demand for Welsh medium education, as this is below the LA and Government targets. There is a need to move away from this mindset and act in a much more proactive way. The historical tendency to assume that any new schools will be English medium must be avoided. • We consider that a general policy should be to adopt a policy to "adequately increase the provision of Welsh medium education in areas where new housing is built".
<p>Outcome 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We agree with the interpretation that transition is not a concern except from Cylchoedd Meithrin (nursery) to Welsh medium schools, and from KS4 to KS5. Traveling distance is recognized as a factor in the transition from Cylchoedd Meithrin to Welsh medium schools. Establishing another school would help this. One thinks in particular of the North Pontypridd area where the LA's latest plans indicate that there will be a brand new English medium school in the area. There is an urgent need for a Welsh medium school in this important area. Regarding provision of clear progression routes, the move towards co-location of nursery groups/units and primary schools which will be an important step towards rectifying this situation is welcomed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer rates from the Cylchoedd Meithrin show a very low rate going into Welsh medium primary schools. It is encouraging to see that there was a 10.6% increase in 2019/2020. What is unclear is why this happened. Further analysis is needed to ensure that a target is set annually and that definite actions are added in order to achieve a higher percentage so that transfer rates into Welsh medium primary education underpin the required target in Outcome 2. • It is good to see that transfer rates between key stages in Welsh medium primary education are consistently high. Can this be extended by noting the patterns and transition systems of the school clusters? • However, the challenge of post-16 education needs to be analyzed and resolved as this data is significantly lower. • On page 19 it states that the Local Authority has worked in partnership with neighboring Local Authorities to achieve the 720 learners in year one in Welsh medium education by 2032. More detail on what this work entails and what impact this will have on the current numbers within the border schools would be helpful here. How many pupils, for example, travel across County boundaries? Why is this happening? Further analysis would help us to better understand the challenge that these schools might face if they are close to a border with another Local Authority. • We do not accept that it is not possible to estimate the numbers leaving nursery playgroups. Mudiad Meithrin provides annual data to Local Authorities. We would suggest that a new system should be created to broadly predict where the early learners are, what processes are in place to promote Welsh medium education for those early learners and how that promotion has had a positive effect on transfer rates to Welsh medium primary schools. • We agree with the comments on page 20 that there are various reasons why pupils do not transfer to Welsh medium primary schools from Welsh medium playgroups. What is missing from this Outcome is how this will be addressed. What are the plans for ensuring that more children transfer from the early years to Welsh medium primary education? What are the projects that will ensure equality of provision across all areas of the County? If we cannot see them in this document, how do we know they are happening? Details of the type of action to be taken, the method of monitoring and who will be responsible for this work are required. • It is good to see the LA's plans for significant improvements to Welsh medium schools in its latest publication. The building in Llanharry is now in a poor state of repair and the two English schools that the children could be going to instead of Llanharry are new buildings. It is also good to see plans for Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda. However, keeping a thriving primary school in the center of Porth is vital.
Outcome 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A geographical analysis of the LA's secondary provision would be useful here in order to identify where the primary feeder numbers are present. Seeing any gaps could then help with further planning for the period of this plan.

- It is good to read on page 23 that there are actions in place to expand secondary places but it would be useful to note exactly where the 187 new places (p26) at Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun will be and how it will impact on the provision and improve the LA's position as a whole and in the Rhydywaun cluster area.
- We note that the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council WESP commits to undertake a feasibility study to establish Welsh medium secondary provision in Merthyr Tydfil within the first 5 years of their Plan. This is a very significant commitment and, if implemented, would have far-reaching implications on the numbers of Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun. There needs to be an ongoing dialogue between the two LAs as this work progresses, in order to plan and take action early enough, to avoid any adverse consequences for Welsh medium secondary provision in the Cynon Valley, e.g. revisiting proposal timetables for Welsh medium primary schools in the Cynon Valley. This also provides an opportunity for RCT to consider what other options are available to establish schools in new geographical areas in this part of the County.
- It is also noted that some schools have surplus places. Further analysis of the reasons for this would be useful to identify any further actions for the period of this strategy.
- The challenges need to be identified and set in clear targets in this strategy. There are not enough specifics here at this point to be able to set a baseline. The narrative is promising but the current situation is clear enough.
- There is no breakdown of subject range or post-16 education element. Where will the Welsh language provision be? Who leads on the breadth of provision? What systems are in place to ensure the provision? What is the role of the Education Consortium in this?
- The data table at the end of the Outcome is vague.
- With exciting developments underway for post-16 education in the English medium sector, it is also very important to invest in the Welsh medium sector so that an equally attractive offer is available through the medium of Welsh. The attempt to promote Welsh medium education could also contribute to this Objective, of course.
- There is a need to continue to develop more collaboration between the LA's secondary schools to enable them to offer the widest range of Welsh medium courses - including vocational courses. Particular emphasis is needed on health and care, childcare etc.
- Opportunities to collaborate with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol also need to be developed to promote study pathways in the Higher Education sector.
- We also believe that there is a need to support pupils who are not continuing in the Sixth Form, and working with Coleg y Cymoedd to identify opportunities to develop Welsh medium provision - possibly in conjunction with schools - is a critical area that needs urgent attention.
- Workplace opportunities for students need to be identified and promoted and there is potential to create a specific resource to achieve this, possibly as a follow-up project to the leaflet promoting Welsh medium education - 'Being Bilingual'.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council needs to take the lead on this work, as the area's main employer, and take a proactive role in promoting workforce entry opportunities across the whole range of the Local Authority's services.
Outcome 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an opportunity in this Outcome to demonstrate the breadth of partnership working which is stated. It is not clear enough in the consultation document how all community partners will operate. There should be clear targets from the partners in this Outcome to show how they will also cater for the growth in the target. To successfully deliver the Plan, the LA needs to show clearly how they are contributing financially to support the work of the partners, and to consider opportunities to expand and extend that financial support in the face of the growing demands of planned growth in the Welsh medium sector, along with the expected expansion of English medium schools also improving and increasing their use of Welsh. We must work to ensure that Welsh is not seen solely as the language of the school, and that it is normalized as a community language. Funding partners to support that work is essential. How is the success of this Outcome going to be measured? This is not clear to us either.
Outcome 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are aware of the excellent work of Rhondda Cynon Taf's ALN department over the years and it is good to see that the LA is fully aware of its responsibility as the new law comes into force. It would be good to see an analysis of how the £3.4 million set out on page 33 will contribute to the Welsh language sector. There is not enough analysis in this Outcome as it stands to know what the current provision is across the County in order to establish a baseline for improvement and progress in provision. We would have expected a statistical analysis of the numbers of pupils currently receiving support, the range of expertise currently available through the medium of Welsh and then how the County will close any gaps. Will there be cross-County collaboration? Is there an opportunity to develop centres of expertise across the County and share this expertise to a wider audience? What about the professional training opportunities? Who will provide this, for whom and when? What support is there for parents as part of this Plan? How does the County establish a relationship with parents and support them especially if learners are not from Welsh speaking homes? There is a need to continue to work closely with parents and schools to get a full picture of the situation in the County and to respond appropriately to those needs. RCT has capacity in many areas that neighbouring Counties do not. We are keen to encourage the LA to share good practice and expertise across the County wherever possible.
Outcome 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Here, there is little analysis of the current workforce within the Welsh medium sector in order to establish a baseline. Indeed, there is an opportunity in this Outcome to identify who the "teaching staff" are.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At first glance it may be sufficient to identify those who work as teachers and headteachers, but as an organization, we are convinced that Local Authorities must consider the whole range of workforce that supports education - including the administrative staff within the schools, support officers within the Local Authority and the Education Consortium, as well as the assistants. We know only too well how important it is to have the full range of the workforce to support a scheme as important as this Plan. • We therefore expect a detailed analysis of the Welsh language skills of the LA's education workforce as they all have, in one way or another, responsibility for the Welsh language within their work. • It will also be important to identify how many additional staff will be required for the higher numbers and new schools opening in the life of this Plan and how the County will promote these posts and support the professional development of the education workforce. • There is a need to develop Welsh medium teacher training courses, and offer intensive refresher courses for teachers willing to convert to Welsh medium education, again through work-release schemes and the development of the Sabbatical Scheme. Securing a supply of headteachers for the future is an important priority. There is also a need to promote opportunities for learning through the medium of Welsh among pupils who choose careers. • Is it possible to implement discussions between the schools, the Teachers' Unions and the Consortia to explore the possibilities at a local level? • It also needs to be acknowledged that the Local Authority cannot be responsible for all the content of this target either and that responding to recruitment gaps and challenges is also the responsibility of Welsh Government as well as local government. There should be a formal mechanism for collating information on these challenges and a systematic means of communicating them effectively and quickly back to Welsh Government's Education Department so that it can inform the national workforce strategy. |
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Overall, we note that it would be advisable to set much more specific targets at the 5 year and 10 year point in order to have more clear and clear milestones. At present the targets are too vague.

We agree that having a promotional strategy to accompany this Plan, identifying aspects to be implemented annually for the 7 Outcomes, would be a way of keeping track of what needs to be done in terms of stimulating and driving growth. A plan in the form of a traffic light record (RAG Rating) could be used as meetings and activities progressed throughout the year and as the Welsh Education Forum meets to discuss progress. A specific promotional sub-group could be established to address this aspect inviting partners to contribute to the priorities of the Plan, and take action accordingly.

The mapping exercises should have taken place to inform this Plan and we therefore look forward to seeing these details in the revised Plan which will be submitted to Government at the end of January 2022.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with officials to expand on our comments.