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WELSH SPEAKERS AND WELSH LANGUAGE PROVISION WITHIN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

**A REPORT FROM THE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW
SERIES**

WISERD RESEARCH REPORTS SERIES

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Robin Mann

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Author

Robin Mann, Bangor University

Address for Correspondence:

Robin Mann
School of Social Sciences
Bangor University
Neuadd Ogwen
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2DG

Email: r.mann@bangor.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)1248 388879

WISERD Hub Contact:

Cardiff University
46 Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BB

Tel: +44 (0) 2920879338

Email: wiserd@cardiff.ac.uk

BACKGROUND

This report presents findings from Stakeholder Interview data relating to the position of Welsh speakers and Welsh Language provision within the public sector. The main aim of the report is to inform further investigations planned by WISERD researchers on Welsh speakers and the labour market in Wales¹. There has been little previous research in this area. A handful of quantitative studies have pointed to differences between Welsh and non-Welsh speakers in their labour market outcomes (Blackaby et al 2005, Blackaby and Drinkwater 1997, Drinkwater and O'Leary 1997, Henley and Jones 2003, Jones-Evans et al 2011). But little is known about the dynamics underlying these differences. Does being Welsh-English bilingual, all things considered, provide labour market advantages? How has this varied over time? And what factors have driven these differences. The stakeholder interviews can contribute to this area of research by providing qualitative data on the perspectives of senior figures within public sector organisations.

In addition to this aim, the thematic focus of the report informs some of the activities of WISERD Language, Citizenship and Identity thematic group. Thus the report provides a way of linking the stakeholder data, and the localities research programme, to the interests of thematic group members.

THE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The stakeholder interviews represent one of the key programmes of work completed by the WISERD Localities team in its initial phase. Consisting of over 120 in-depth interviews with senior managers working across local authorities and public bodies in Wales, it provides an innovative and unique resource into how local government actors working across various policy sectors come to 'know' their locality and how this knowledge shapes the way they carry out their roles and responsibilities. Respondents interviewed were drawn from two tiers (1 and 2):

Tier 1: Senior Managers/Directors of departments within 7 (out of 22) local authorities across Wales: 2 in North Wales; 2 in West Wales; and 3 in the South Wales Valleys.

Tier 2: Regional Managers/Directors of public bodies and partnerships.

Effort was made to ensure a matching of seniority, role and policy area across the different bodies; and to cover several policy areas (e.g. education; regeneration; environment; cultural

¹ WISERD Mini-Project: Welsh Speakers and the Labour Market.

services; health; housing; and Welsh Language). As a unique data set, the interviews affords examination of the way bilingual policies are perceived and enacted within different localities and policy areas across Wales.

DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

A basic method of analysis was undertaken for the purposes of this report. Key words (e.g. “language”, “speakers/speaking”, “bilingual”) were entered into Atlas.ti search tool. From this it was possible to retrieve extracts from all the interviews in which the Welsh Language or Welsh Speakers were mentioned. Extracts from this search were then entered into a Welsh Language Code. This produced 160 pages (62,697 words) of text relating to the Welsh Language. Various themes were identified from this initial analysis, including: the provision of public services through the medium of Welsh; education and employment; community development and promoting Welsh from the “bottom-up”; as well as demographic change and migration. In this report we focus on the themes relating firstly to the provision of public services and secondly to employment and Welsh speakers,

“SUPPLY AND DEMAND” FOR PROVISION OF SERVICES THROUGH WELSH

There is variation, and sometimes contradictory experiences, in the availability of Welsh Speakers for filling certain posts. This may lead to negotiation of bilingual policies where there is pressure to fill certain posts or to different strategies being employed in order to ensure bilingual requirements are met.

[Local Authority] obviously does all its business through the medium of Welsh. All our staff have to be able to speak Welsh. So we do recruit staff that don't but then they have to train and then that's the difficult one. Because some can learn languages easily [but] you do have some that, really, might have done the course but are never going to get on with it. So, you know, we tend to run with that really. Up to now we never have a political complaint about it, but occasionally they happen. But, you know, when you're balancing what we have to do. We have to recruit, we have to advertise about three times and fail to get somebody, and then we can drop the, the Welsh language.

INT: Okay, so you're allowed to do it then?

But, you know, when you're desperate for a home carer you don't want to advertise three times. You want just to take her (sic.) you know. Because she can do everything but she can't speak Welsh, you know, so you think.

INT: It's a difficult one, isn't it.

Sure, we don't keep to that policy every time because you've got to deliver the service, haven't you? You know, but I think there'd be a very different opinion by some members to that. So it's difficult (North Wales)

We have had a lot of difficulty recruiting people in the past, yes. We have had to train a lot of it ourselves. We set up our own sort of City and Guilds Training Centre here to be able to train people professionally which has been a cost to the company over time. If you can just recruit them and they can walk in on Day One, that's cheaper. We still recruit from them but in the main we have to grow our own. Not least because of the Welsh speaking issue. That's the reason we can deliver the services through the medium of Welsh because we've recruited Welsh speakers and trained them as Careers Advisers. Because you can't do it the other way round. (North Wales)

Likewise, as might be expected, there are differences in the demand for Welsh medium provision and services in different parts of Wales. Notions of choice, demand and lack of uptake from Welsh speakers were central to this.

[Local Authority] has adopted a particular stance and clearly, the national policies of language are very rigorously followed. Within this authority, in the main, we deal with English speakers. I say that cautiously and conscious that I'm going to be transcribed by somebody or other who has the misfortune to listen to all of this. So we obey the rules quite right. And we have very few customers in the children's service who are dealt with in the Welsh language. As a proportion very few. There might be something like 5 out of a 1000, if even that. And I have to say that most of my staff, we obviously have Welsh language specialists who, you know, we know exactly who to call on when we need to. But I have to say the majority are not Welsh speakers, and obviously that is an issue sometimes. Particularly when we deal with colleagues in [Adjacent Local Authority]. So, you know, educationally one's very positive about supporting bilingualism. The reality and I'd be a hypocrite if I said anything different is that I'm hopeless. (West Wales)

[Local Authority], being a little bit of England beyond Wales, everything that we do within the authority in, you know, in connecting with the public, is bilingual. We do have erm, Welsh speakers on the staff who er, can deal with request for material in Welsh language and so on and so forth. In terms of the Library Service, we meet

Welsh public library standards that relates to the provision in Welsh. But we get relatively little request for delivery of service in Welsh (West Wales)

We make the provision if that provision is taken up. But I'm not aware of a ground swell of people who are coming in saying that 'we would like this but 'we would like to deliver it in the medium of Welsh'. This metaphoric dividing line between the north and south of the county, south then there is virtually no request for Welsh. And relatively low Welsh speak, spoken. North then yes there is a lot of Welsh spoken and it is the first language for a lot people. But that doesn't then translate into a serious demand for service delivery, certainly within cultural services, in Welsh. So there is the take up. But it's not demand made in that sense. But we are in a demand type thing where, where we can we make a provision. (West Wales)

There is a Welsh Language Act, it is an Act of parliament. It is rightly recognised that the language is of importance culturally to the nation and we must promote that. And we do promote that. But we live and I work currently in a very monoglot, anglicised area. The amount of Welsh speakers in the area is growing, particularly through youth who are attending Welsh medium schools etc. But for the majority of young people here vast, vast majority, 99%, English is the first language. And I include in that immigrant populations from other cultures because they are also very much under represented compared with the national average locally. So, where you might get, say in [Adjacent Local Authority] for example, not so far away, quite a lot of Arabic speakers, Hindi, Urdu etc...[This Local Authority] and [Adjacent Local Authority] has relatively less of that cultural group than [Adjacent Local Authority] would have in comparison to its overall population. (South Wales)

There are also different assumptions regarding the possible availability of Welsh speakers for certain posts:

I've heard, a number of times I've heard, 'oh we just can't get Welsh speaking staff at all' and I say, well if you advertise as Welsh being a, a necessary...or, erm, what's the word? Desirable. Well what do you bloody expect then, you know? The council got a bundle of money from Europe as well and they set up an ESF group where they had youth workers working across certain schools. They wanted one of these workers to be based in one of the Welsh medium schools. So the teacher, and the head teacher said, yeah, he can come in but he's got to speak Welsh, and I sat in a meeting with these people and they were looking at me because we've got to find people who can

speak Welsh, and they said, how we going to do it? And I said, well you run an advert for these people and say, Welsh essential. And then they, you'd be surprised, you know, people who are actually out there. I mean it just doesn't cross these people's minds that people exist who can do these jobs. Even though they've had Welsh speaking schools [Local Authority] for twenty years, churning out people who speak Welsh. Most of whom are working in Cardiff at the moment in the media. Most of the people I worked with came from [Valleys Local Authority]. So now the people who have left school, everywhere, bloody everywhere, you know. So they're churning out the people and then they're losing them. Because they're not giving them the jobs. And then they're moaning that everyone's leaving the county. That's why. (South Wales)

The data extracts above illustrate the local knowledge assumptions held by stakeholders in West and South Wales, in authorities where the proportion and number of Welsh speakers are low. The data suggests significant variations regarding levels of demand for, and supply of, Welsh Language Skills across different local authorities in different parts of Wales.

EMPLOYMENT AND WELSH LANGUAGE SKILLS

As stated out the outset, there is an existing quantitative evidence base regarding the position of Welsh speakers in the labour market and how this compares to non-Welsh speakers in Wales. However there are competing interpretations (see Day, 2002; Williams and Morris 1999). A range of factors can be identified including educational attainment (Welsh medium schools); bilingual employment policies (for example as a result of the Welsh Language Act); better networks and flows of information amongst Welsh speakers as a minority group; economic restructuring (such as in the increased importance of the media/cultural industries and the service sector more generally); as well as better cognitive skills of bilinguals compared to monolinguals. The promotion of Welsh (by the Welsh Language Board) is also often marketed on the perceived economic or employment advantages of being bilingual. The stakeholder data does provide some contribution to this debate. While language skills or the ability to speak Welsh is central, the data suggests several other processes at play.

VALUE SYSTEMS

Different value systems in different employment sectors translated into seeing different values in employing Welsh speakers. One such value is "local knowledge". This was

particularly evident amongst environmentally orientated stakeholders (such as National Parks, Forestry Commission, Countryside Council for Wales).

We are very much closer to our community because of the language. Very largely because we employ 96%, I can't remember what it is but by far the majority are Welsh speakers. And, um, most of them come from the area. So they know their patch. And so we are able to be grounded in the community. We're aware of or become aware of what the communities feelings are. (North Wales)

You can see this in our staff. How our staff's attitude is towards people. And what their background is to how we recruit people these days. People skills are far, far more important than, very highly developed scientific skills. Welsh language skills are far more highly developed now than they used to be. I mean I'm the only Welsh speaking director; well no there are two of us now, Welsh speaking directors in [public organisation]. At one point, I was the only Welsh speaking district team leader which is somebody at a very local on the ground level. At that point Welsh wasn't seen as being important being able to deal with people wasn't seen as being important...but we've certainly, now. And I think the advent of the Assembly has helped us to understand that. You've got to be part of the community you work in. You've got to be able to manage your people and work with the people and take their views into account. Dealing with consultations and things like that. We've got to be much more, you know, close to our people (North Wales)

What is interesting is that in majority Welsh speaking areas, Welsh speakers provide local knowledge and enable you to get close to your people. While ability to speak Welsh is valued, this is presented as secondary to the local knowledge that only local (Welsh speaking) people can provide. The emphasis is upon local people rather than Welsh speakers from outside the area(?). Of course, this citizen-centred approach may not translate into valuation of Welsh speakers in other areas where the proportion of Welsh speakers is low. Another identified value was "cultural Awareness". This relates to Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital' which is associated with the reproduction of class inequality. This may be at play in industries such as arts, media and other cultural industries. As stated by this Arts stakeholder:

INT: Do you think people are more particularly interested in the Arts, we've talked about this before in Wales?

Yeah I think, Welsh speakers in particular I think engage naturally really. It is part of the culture isn't it more culturally aware I think. I think it makes our job easier. I think what I'm noticing is that it changes. I think, people come in and may be there's more incoming. I think there's a lot of our brighter young Welsh speakers going to Cardiff, but then they've probably always left. But they've always probably gone to Manchester, Liverpool and London before. More people going to Cardiff I think. And probably staying there for the early parts of their careers I think. As I said they've probably always left, and in a way it is perhaps better that we're actually retaining them in Wales now. (South Wales)

“We create jobs for Welsh speakers”: Bilingualism and economic circles

There are economic advantages in speaking Welsh. Let's not beat about the bush, you know. There are, there are jobs for Welsh speakers. We create jobs for Welsh speakers. That's as part of our, our remit in a way. We make Welsh attractive not just by providing the services but, but in providing the services we also provide work. So it closes the circle. There's work for the people leaving the school to provide the services which the people leaving the school need. (South Wales)

“Young people don't see the advantage of speaking Welsh”

I am being very general now. Someone longs more for it and that is why perhaps there is more call for things in Welsh education circles. There is also an indifference. Especially among perhaps young people and young parents. Again I am generalising. They are not aware of the advantages of transferring the Welsh language and don't see opportunities to use the language. And this is especially true of the young people. There is a blame emphasis that is being put on the international multitude media. (North Wales)

Young parents don't perhaps realise the industrial, economic, and social worth of speaking the Welsh language. I look back at the years when seeing the Welsh language as a subject with no purpose to it. I was speaking to a friend a while ago who was saying that it was a pity that he hadn't used and kept his Welsh. Because by now, in public posts etc., there is far more of an advantage if someone can speak the Welsh language. Once someone loses the confidence to use it, there is a spiral of not being ready to use it. We are now in a situation where there is a call for Welsh

speaker in the workplace but, for some reason, young people don't realise the economic worth in this, and it comes to them too late in the day. (North Wales)

Our evidence suggests that whilst Welsh speakers do well in the public sector, they do less well in the private sector. There may be different value systems here. The stakeholder below describes this in relation to the tourism industry:

There's a slight issue from the Welsh speaking and Welsh language perspective. A lot of people who speak Welsh see tourism somehow as incompatible with the Welsh language. So you have lots and lots of successful tourism. You suck people in and you do such a good job that they start buying houses and pushing Welsh speaking people out. Personally I don't buy that but I think there's an element of opposition on both sides. It's not just, people moving and thinking the Welsh language is an inconvenience. But it's also people who are Welsh speaking themselves and communities that are Welsh speaking, not really embracing tourism as a route out of a slightly difficult economic position. It's more economic *raison-d'être* to the agricultural towns that have been in decline for decades. But it's not embracing tourism as an alternative to that. It's very nervous and wary about tourism as an industry on its own, and I think maybe we need to do something there. (North Wales)

I think that companies who move into the area. Maybe don't value it as much as the sort of indigenous companies. You know you can hear if an employer's got a new employee and they say and "he speaks Welsh", it's like a bonus really. (North Wales)

INTERSECTIONS OF WELSH LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CLASS

There was a clear perception amongst some stakeholders of Welsh speakers as more middle class.

I think what would be interesting in a way to do a socioeconomic breakdown of the Welsh and English sets in secondary education. Because I think, again it's anecdotal through experience, that there are more middle class Welsh speakers than middle class English speakers. By preference because, you know, they're estranged in the secondary school. Into the language set. So by, you know if you follow that through then those people that speak Welsh will be more successful in the labour market. It's whether it's a linguistic reason or a socioeconomic reason. (North Wales)

The middle classness of Welsh speakers was expressed most resentfully by the following stakeholder:

It's political correct trendy, isn't it? And the local middle class Welsh families would like that. The Welsh language is actually, in its modern form very middle class. To go back to some of this social economics. The free school meals index in Welsh medium schools is very, very low. And most parents who choose Welsh medium education do it on the basis of having what looks like a slightly more preferential bit of treatment. And that I find cynical. But you can only say in certain company. So I think Wales is a myth personally. I've always believed strongly actually in Britain. Although I would argue with anyone that Cardiff is not Wales. Cardiff is a cosmopolitan British city and Welsh is not the second most commonly spoken language in Cardiff. English is obviously the main language. But the second main language is Gujarati. Followed by Urdu. And there are half a dozen others before you hit Welsh. The only pockets of Welsh in Cardiff are in S4C land and the Taffy are in Pontcanna, I mean that's the reality of it. And it's very middle class. But look at it, the little Welsh deli down in Pontcanna. There's strong feeling. I don't say it because of Section 6²(South Wales)

The stakeholder describes Cardiff as “not Wales” and does this by pointing to its multiethnic and multilingual make-up. Yet in so doing mobilises a categorisation of “Wales” as antithetical to cosmopolitanism or multicultural (i.e. Cardiff is not Wales because it is cosmopolitan). Thus the possible civic categorisation of “Welsh” or “Wales” as containing difference (in a way that category “British” is taken to accomplish) is closed off.

But there also some contradictions relating to social class, particularly in majority Welsh speaking areas. There is some discussion of less advantaged Welsh speakers self-excluding from using Welsh in the workplace due to lack of confidence and this may be related to social class.

Another element is the lack of confidence of Welsh speakers themselves. For example, in the stronghold areas like Blaenau Ffestiniog, Llangefni and Caernarfon, first language Welsh speakers feel that their Welsh isn't enough to be able to get jobs in Gwynedd council or in the university. Not only a lack of confidence in non-Welsh speakers to use Welsh, and then there is danger perhaps that the language is increasingly seen as a middle class language. (North Wales)

²Section 6” refers to the European Convention of Human Rights Act 1998.

It's to do about confidence about using the Welsh as well. The more people that have used it in schools in lessons. There are lots of Welsh speaking kids that aren't in Welsh speaking streams, and they're the groups that perhaps wouldn't feel confident about using it in a work place. And a lot of our Welsh, most of our staff are bilingual. But not all of them are confident in writing. (North Wales)

SUMMARY

The aim of this report has been to identify key themes within the Stakeholder Interview data set regarding Welsh Language provision and the position of Welsh speakers. Two key areas were focused on. Firstly, the provision of public services through the medium of Welsh. Considerable variation was found regarding the availability of Welsh speakers to fill certain posts. Thus while bilingual policies are national, there may be local negotiations of bilingual policies where there are immediate needs to fill positions. Different strategies were also identified with regard to how organisations ensure bilingual requirements are met. There are also regional differences, as may be expected, in perceived demand for services through the medium of Welsh. Interestingly there is evidence of local knowledge being drawn on by stakeholders as part of their perceptions of whether Welsh speakers are 'out there' – either to fill positions or to take up services being provided.

Secondly, are perceptions regarding the economic advantages of speaking Welsh. Here the data suggest a range of factors at play. Different employment sectors may have different valuations of Welsh speakers in terms of what they offer. For example, providing local knowledge or cultural knowledge. The need for Welsh language skills, while more prominent in majority Welsh speaking areas, may also emerge in areas in south Wales where Welsh medium education continues to develop. Yet some contradictions were also identified. Young people for instance were commonly described as not seeing the advantages of Welsh language skills. Many young, first language, Welsh speakers were also described as lacking confidence in using Welsh in the workplace and this was related to education.

Clearly as a self contained study this research and data cannot address many of the questions raised. But it does provide indications of various factors at play and which can be more rigorously interrogated via a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Clearly the focus is solely on the public sector. Avenues for future research therefore could be aimed at a better understanding of different valuations of Welsh between the public and private sectors, as well as between larger and small sized businesses and organisations. In the first

instance, this could include further qualitative interviews with employers and careers advisors across different parts of Wales. Finally, comparative European research could be undertaken to understand the relationship between bi-/multi-lingualism and their impact on labour markets and regional economic growth.

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