

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.ⁱ 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 Welshⁱⁱ.

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 Languagesⁱⁱⁱ came into force in the UK in July 2001.
- ◆ The EU's Framework Strategy for Multilingualism^{iv} was published in December 2005.

