Empowering Communities for Cultural Resilience through the Welsh language in sport

Policy Brief Autumn 2026

SUMMARY

This participatory action research project centred on co-designing practical interventions through a social 'Innovation Lab'. The Lab involved two full-day workshops in Autumn 2025, attended by 36 participants overall, each selected for their relevant knowledge and experience. The aim was to bring together a diverse group of people occupying different roles across sectors relating to sport and the Welsh language. The focus of the workshops was the social use of Welsh in sports activities within a rural context. Ynys Môn / Anglesey was chosen due to the fact that while overall it has a relatively high proportion of Welsh speakers compared to the rest of Wales, it also has communities with lower percentages of speakers, and communities in which a language shift seems to be occurring. The project aims to tackle a challenge that has been identified as a priority by policy practitioners and researchers; a recent study by Rhian Hodges and Cynog Prys at Bangor University found that Welsh speakers who are involved in sports clubs or take part in sporting activities are less likely to use the language in this context when compared to others.

The group discussed the central question: "What would it take to support and increase the social use of Welsh as part of sports and leisure activities across Anglesey's communities?" During the course of the two days, the participants generated a set of proposals designed to increase the social use of Welsh in sport. Based on the workshops and the proposals co-produced by participants, we offer the following recommendations to policymakers.

BACKGROUND

Study Objectives

This study is part of wider work by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales on Empowering Communities for Cultural Resilience. It both explores the current status of the social use of Welsh in sport on Anglesey, and aims to generate practical and innovative interventions to encourage the Welsh language to be spoken in sports settings.

Policy Context

The Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities reported to Welsh Government that there is a need to give 'specific attention to the field of sport and leisure within areas of higher linguistic significance' and that 'everything possible should be done to ensure that sports and leisure clubs make extensive use of the Welsh language' (Welsh Government 2024:122). In addition, recent research by the Welsh Language Commissioner highlights the 'potential of sport as a vehicle for increasing the use of Welsh among children and young people.' Therefore it is necessary to consider how sports clubs can be supported to create more opportunities for Welsh to be used 'when participating, when coaching, and when refereeing and administering' (Welsh Language Commissioner 2025: 5). Furthermore, in a recent study of language-use patterns on Anglesey it was found that Welsh speakers who are involved in sports clubs or take part in sporting activities are less likely to use the language in this context. As a result, one of the study's recommendations was that community sports clubs should be encouraged to promote Welsh as part of their activities in order to support the social use of Welsh on Anglesey (Hodges et al. 2023:5).

The Evidence Base

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales delivered a series of Innovation Lab workshops on *Empowering Communities for Cultural Resilience through the Welsh Language in Sport*, designed to co-produce innovative proposals that support the development of a wellbeing economy in Wales. The Labs convened 36 participants selected for their relevant knowledge and experience, representing local authorities and the Welsh Government. Two full-day workshops held in September and October 2025 provided a structured process to examine the current status, envision desirable futures for the sector, and co-design potential interventions capable of enabling this transition.

Across the sessions, participants also contributed a wide range of additional ideas and insights on how best to drive increased use of the social use of Welsh in Sport. These reflections provided insight into the views of key stakeholders across the system, helping to shape both the analysis and the recommended actions that follow.

KEY FINDINGS

The use of the Welsh language varies widely across sports settings

Participants observed that while some clubs are actively using Welsh as a default or proactively encouraging its wider use, others who have cohorts of mixed language ability can find it difficult to conduct activities both sporting and organisational through the medium of Welsh, even in contexts where the majority of those involved in the club are Welsh speakers. This leads to some sports clubs defaulting to English in activities, sessions, award nights and day-to-day governance. Welsh-speaking coaches may switch to English due to mixed-language groups or lack of confidence in their Welsh within a sporting context.

Structural barriers include limited Welsh-speaking coaches and volunteers

There is anecdotal reporting of a shortage of Welsh-speaking qualified coaches, trustees and officers ready, able and willing to undertake the tasks required to run sports clubs. Participants cited the fact that English had been more prevalent in some sports leading to uncertainty regarding terminology and an inconsistent approach to adopting and enacting specific language policies. Participants often cited the fact that there has been minimal guidance or requirements from governing bodies on language use and the practical steps that could be taken to implement the use of the Welsh language in bilingual settings.

Mixed-language situations and assumptions reinforce English language dominance

Participants cited a tendency to view sport as a context in with the English-language is the prevalent language. Also mentioned was a tendency to switch to English to be ‘polite’ or ‘acceptable’ in situations where people of mixed ability are present. Some coaches also expressed wanting to ensure team focus and clarity of coaching messages in a mixed language situation. Coaches also expressed concerns about using the correct Welsh terminology for specific sports.

Despite the challenges, some clubs are exploring practical solutions

Some providers (such as Yr Urdd) offer specific Welsh-medium sports sessions but these do not always attract sufficient numbers to be viable, and are also perceived to exist in competition with established clubs. Some clubs have adopted formal language policies but these are not the norm and their implementation can be inconsistent. Visibility of the Welsh in the form of signage, official forms, web presence and social media communications is present in some of the clubs of which participants were members. Most representatives of the sports clubs that took part would like support to develop practical steps to support the use of the Welsh language.

RECOMMENDATIONS – Interventions designed through the 'Labs'

From the findings summarised above, we propose several recommendations for the Welsh Government / local authorities, developed as suitable interventions to implement:

Strengthen the everyday use of the Welsh language within sports clubs by developing practical, sport-specific Welsh language resources and supporting club-level ambassadors.	**Develop Welsh-language resources for sports clubs:** Work with governing bodies, clubs and linguists to create a bank of useful Welsh terms and phrases tailored to specific sports as a means of better, enabling both non-speakers and developing speakers to use Welsh in social, informal sporting environments. **Collaborate with a sample of local clubs:** Identify and work with willing clubs to co-produce resources and test their use in real settings, helping ensure relevance and practical application. **Establish a network of club 'ambassadors':** Each participating club appoints an ambassador to co-develop materials, champion Welsh language use within their club, and connect with other ambassadors to share learning and good practice for future wider dissemination.
Introduce and embed the principles of language resilience within sports clubs by empowering Welsh-proficient coaches and officials to use Welsh more consistently across club activities.	**Apply language assertiveness principles to club settings:** Equip coaches and club officials who already speak Welsh to use the language more confidently and extensively during training, meetings, events, and social activities—tailored to each club's linguistic context. **Deliver a programme of resilience workshops:** Work with a sample of local clubs to run structured sessions exploring good practice, followed by a trial period of implementing new language behaviours and reviewing their effects. Disseminate good practices that are developed within the initial pilot clubs. **Support volunteer-led participation:** Recognise that clubs rely heavily on volunteers and consider whether small financial incentives are appropriate to support the clubs with these language training sessions; the overarching aim is to generate practical approaches that can be scaled and shared across other clubs in future.
Enhance the support that national sports governing bodies provide to local clubs in using the Welsh language, addressing gaps between national-level commitments and community-level impact.	**Align national commitments with community-level support:** Work with governing bodies and local clubs to audit current Welsh-language promotion activities, raise staff awareness, and embed Welsh-language considerations within mainstream organisational processes—especially those shaping community sport. **Create recognition frameworks to drive behaviour change:** Co-develop a 'standard award' celebrating clubs that give Welsh a strong visual and verbal presence, and introduce a 'Sports Heroes' award recognising volunteers or clubs that significantly advance the use of Welsh in sport. **Develop scalable good practice for wider rollout:** Use findings from the pilot national body to shape guidance and models that can be adapted by other governing bodies in future to strengthen consistent, practical Welsh-language support.
Combine several approaches to build resilience for current speakers and increase the confidence and motivation of new learners.	**Develop Language Awareness Training Across Sectors** Empower organisations to operate in a manner that is culturally aware, compliant, and aligned with national language goals through sharing knowledge about the policy context, historical, social and cultural significance. **Provide Language Confidence and Resilience Training** Establish approaches for building language confidence and resilience among staff and community organisations. **Produce Sector-Specific Welsh Learning Resources** Design accessible and practical language resources, ensure they are sector-specific and align with the needs of the organisation. **Conduct Research and Lead Community-Focused Welsh Language Projects** Support projects that are embedded within the community and that strengthen learning about how to develop bilingual social networks and activities.

PROJECT INFORMATION

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In collaboration with

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Further reading

Further information on LIP's Innovation Labs can be accessed at www.lpip.cymru

For more information

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