

Opting In or Opting Out? How is Choice of Language Medium Presented to Further Education Learners in Wales and What Influence Does This Have on Their Choices?

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways in which choice of language medium is presented to Further Education learners in Wales and its influence on their choices, using principles of behavioural economics. The study analyses one of the reasons for the low number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually in this sector. It suggests recommendations to improve the situation in the context of the Welsh Government's target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. The research is based on a sample of four different areas across Wales, drawing on semi-structured interviews with staff in schools and Further Education colleges, and on focus groups with pupils in the final year of their statutory education. The article explains the limitations of the model of 'opting in' to Welsh-medium and bilingual provision, with its emphasis on giving information to change behaviour, and investigates the relative strengths of the model of 'opting out' of such provision. The article argues in favour of applying principles of behavioural economics to language choice, through modifying choice architecture. It recommends changing the default language of provision, placing learners from Welsh and bilingual schools on Welsh-medium or bilingual provision, with the option to opt out if they wish.

Keywords: behavioural economics, bilingual education, Further Education, language choice, language policy, Welsh.

Introduction

Despite the increase in the number of learners studying through the medium of Welsh¹ in the statutory sector in Wales and, more recently, the number of students studying through Welsh in the Higher Education sector, only a small number of learners follow Welsh-medium provision in the Further Education sector (FE).² One of the main aims of *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* (the Welsh Government's current national Welsh language strategy) is 'to ensure that fewer young people lose their Welsh language skills when moving from statutory education to further/higher education, and that more reach their mid-twenties with a command of the language' (Welsh Government, 2017: 31). The lack of Welsh and bilingual provision in the Further Education sector is a long-term problem, especially in vocational subjects (for example *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, 1984: 2; Baker and Jones, 1999: 20; Webb, 2007: 21–2; Heath, 2001: 111; Estyn, 2008: 10). In addition, the number of FE learners that take advantage of existing Welsh and bilingual provision remains low (Arad, 2014: 76; Estyn, 2016: 10; 2017: 9). There is a particularly large deficit in provision and the number of learners following such provision in FE colleges.³ However, there has been a scarcity of research on Welsh FE learners' linguistic choices. The need for change in this sector is recognised in *Cymraeg 2050* (Welsh Government, 2017: 40):

A change of gear is needed for the post-compulsory sector within further and higher education ... to expand the Welsh-medium and bilingual offer. This will require recruiting more learners to continue some or all their studies through the medium of Welsh.

Aim

The aim of this article is to address the deficit outlined above by analysing FE learners' linguistic choices and to make recommendations to increase the number studying through Welsh and bilingually in the sector. The article focuses on the way in which the choice of language medium is presented to learners and how this influences their choices, drawing on principles from behavioural economics. The research question that this article therefore seeks to answer is 'How is the "choice" of language medium presented to FE learners and what influence does this have on their choices?'

Conceptual framework

In order to interpret the results, the article draws upon principles of behavioural economics, which are outlined briefly in this section. Traditional economic theory presupposes a connection between rationality and choice: human beings make decisions logically. Choice can be explained through the concept of preference ordering (Simon, 1955: 100). Classic accounts of economic theory also presuppose that preferences are fixed and constant, and on the basis of the information that an individual has at a specific time, they make the decision which is in their best interest, and do not repeat their mistakes. This is the foundation of rational choice theory and Simon's (1955: 99) *homo economicus* (rational man).

Behavioural economists, however, argue that it is unrealistic to presuppose that people always make rational decisions that are in their best interests. Simon (1972: 162) coined the term 'bounded rationality' to refer to the actor's limitations as a processor of information. This actor is not irrational but less rational than the *homo economicus*. Tversky and Kahneman (1974: 1124) built on Simon's theory and developed the concept of heuristics: rules of thumb that help people make choices quickly, reducing the cognitive effort and time needed to make a decision from scratch. These heuristics can work effectively, but can also lead to systematic biases. One such heuristic is the anchoring and adjustment heuristic, which involves anchoring our decisions around a specific point, and adapting them in relation to this point. Some points are more accessible than other information, such as the status quo, and this can lead to status quo bias: a tendency to favour the current situation at the expense of change (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988). In addition, behavioural economists assume that the brain has two systems of thinking, a concept formulated by Stanovich and West (2000), which was further developed by Kahneman (2002). 'System 1' is the automatic system, which is fast and can feel instinctive, while 'System 2' is the reflective system, which is more intentional and self-conscious (Kahneman, 2002: 45). Over-reliance on the automatic system can lead to mistakes. Interventions based on behavioural economics, therefore, target this first system of thinking.

The principles of traditional economic theory and humans' rationality are an essential part of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism introduces mechanisms of the market into the supply of public services, including education providers, namely competition and maximising choice (Legrand, 1991: 1257). Neo-liberalism has had a prominent place in education in Britain since the Education Reform Act 1988, which fostered principles of choice

and competition in the statutory and post-compulsory sectors (Mufti, Kassem and Murphy, 2008: 58). The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 increased competition between schools and colleges, promoting learners' ability to choose (Maguire, Ball and Macrae, 1999: 292). However, behavioural economists argue that there is need for an alternative attitude from the state in order to lead to desirable behaviour. Thaler and Sunstein (2003a; 2003b) coined the term 'libertarian paternalism' to describe the attitude they propose. They define the term as 'an approach that preserves freedom of choice but that authorises both private and public institutions to steer people in directions that will promote their welfare' (Thaler and Sunstein, 2003a: 179). They also argue that, in many cases, there is no alternative to paternalism, and an organisation or agent must make a choice that will affect other people's behaviour (Thaler and Sunstein, 2003b: 5). As Bradbury, McGimpsey and Santori (2013: 253) explain, the aim of libertarian paternalism is not to supplant neo-liberalism, but to refine it, by recognising the limitations of the actor and bounded rationality.

The principal method of implementing libertarian paternalism is through framing choices in a way that encourages people to make a 'profitable' choice. It is possible to design a system to counteract people's tendencies to make bad decisions, without removing their freedom to choose. Thaler and Sunstein (2008: 3) coined the term 'choice architecture' for the context in which people make decisions. They describe the aspect of choice architecture that influences behaviour as a 'nudge': 'A nudge ... is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives' (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008: 6). An important aspect of choice architecture that policymakers need to consider is the power of defaults. People's preference for the default derives from the status quo bias (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988: 37). Changing from the default takes time and effort and such 'friction costs', that is 'small, seemingly irrelevant details that make a task more challenging or effortful', can be barriers that prevent such actions (Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), 2014: 9).

There are several challenges in applying principles of behavioural economics to changing linguistic behaviour, including proving objectively that possessing Welsh language skills is profitable for learners. However, one should consider the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism (Baker and Wright, 2017: 141–50, 379–81) and the role of Welsh in one's sense of identity, including non-Welsh speakers (Giles, Taylor and Bourhis,

1997). In addition, the target of increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually has already been set in Welsh education policy (Welsh Government, 2017: 42; Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, 2018). The aim of this article is to propose ways of realising this target; debating its validity is beyond the scope of the article.

Policy context

The study lies in the context of the Welsh Government's target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. *Cymraeg 2050* notes that the education system is the principal method of creating new speakers (Welsh Government, 2017: 31). There is a specific target encompassing the FE sector in the strategy, namely '[to] develop post-compulsory education provision which increases rates of progression and supports everyone, whatever their command of the language, to develop Welsh language skills for use socially and in the workplace' (Welsh Government, 2017: 42). Following recent Welsh Government interest in the sector and the establishment of a task and finish group in 2018, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol published a Welsh-medium action plan for the FE sector.⁴ The plan proposes a skills development model based on four areas: awareness, understanding, confidence and fluency (Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, 2018: 6).

How is language choice presented and what is its influence?

Whilst there is a body of research that explores students' linguistic choices in Higher Education (Williams, 2003; Lewis and Williams, 2006; Jones, 2010; Hinton, 2011; Davies and Trystan, 2011), fewer studies explore learners' linguistic choices in the FE sector in depth (Heath, 2001; Morris Jones, 2010; Davies and Davies, 2015; Davies, 2019). A few works analyse how language choice is presented, and the influence of this on service users in the context of Welsh services and technology (Keegan and Evas, 2012; Elias, 2014; Jones, 2014a, 2014b; Citizens Advice Bureau, 2015; Griffith, 2018). This sets a precedent for applying principles of behavioural economics to language policy. *Cymraeg 2050* (Welsh Government, 2017: 53) also alludes to behavioural economics. A minority of research, however, has applied behavioural economics to education research in Wales, although this is more common in England (Sanders, Chande and Selley, 2017; BIT, 2014; Hume et al., 2018). One example of Welsh education research that applies principles of behavioural economics is Elias (2017).

This work contains a case study of universities' automatic registration processes, which default learners from Welsh schools into Welsh-medium provision in HE. The author concludes that such a model led to increasing the number of students studying through Welsh in these universities, as it targets the friction costs involved in having to change from English to Welsh provision (Elias, 2017: 293, 282). However, Elias (2017: 303) acknowledges that it was difficult to isolate the effect of changing the default from other elements of the registration process, for example a student's conversation with a tutor, and the intervention was also implemented differently in different universities.

No study to date focuses on the way in which language choice is presented to FE learners and its influence on their choices. However, in research by Davies and Davies (2012: 11), the concept of setting Welsh as the default medium of study for learners from Welsh and bilingual schools, is noted as an example of good practice in increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh in FE colleges. Aside from this work, there is an emphasis in research on giving learners a choice, without questioning the principle and without considering how the choice is presented or the context of such a choice (e.g. Huxley, 1990: 35; Williams, 1997: 7; Estyn, 2017: 6). 'Encouraging' learners to study through Welsh or bilingually is another strategy that is promoted in the context of language choice in FE (e.g. Arad, 2014: 7), often by giving information regarding the advantages of studying through Welsh or bilingually (e.g. Estyn, 2017: 4). However, these works do not consider the limitations of giving information in order to change behaviour.

Method

Four local authorities (LA) were selected for this study, each with a different geographical, socio-economic and linguistic nature, including the percentage of the population that is able to speak Welsh. LA 1 is in north Wales, with a high concentration of Welsh speakers. LA 2 is in south-east Wales, as is LA 3. LA 2 has seen a growth in the number of Welsh speakers and in Welsh education (Welsh Language Commissioner, 2015: 52). LA 4 is in south-west Wales, and has a substantial percentage of Welsh speakers. One FE college in each area was selected to conduct semi-structured interviews with staff, and also one Welsh-medium or category 2A bilingual school⁵ in each college's catchment area. In order to limit the scope of the

research, four vocational subjects were selected: health and social, child care, tourism and business. The criteria for participants from schools were:

- a teacher in one of these vocational areas
- head of year 11 or sixth form, or the vocational subjects co-ordinator
- Welsh speakers.

The criteria for participants from colleges were:

- lecturers in one of the four subject areas or a Bilingual Champion⁶
- able to speak Welsh or learning Welsh.⁷

Focus groups were conducted with pupils in the final year of statutory education, who were in the process of making decisions about their FE, including the linguistic medium of their courses. The criteria for focus group participants were:

- year 11 pupils
- Welsh speakers
- intending to study (a) vocational subject(s), either in the sixth form or in an FE college.

Table 1. Institutions by local authority

Local authority	College	School⁸
LA 1	College A	School AP
		School AN
		School S
LA 2	College B	School C
		School AL
		School Ch
LA 3	College C	School Dd
		School D
		School E
LA 4 ⁹	College Ch	School Ff
		School G

The gatekeeper method was used to recruit participants, with a designated teacher in each school selecting pupils who met these criteria. The study sought to ensure a range of participants in regard to gender, home language (Welsh, English or both), the vocational subjects that the learners wished to study and the type of FE institution selected. Focus groups were conducted in the four selected schools and in two additional schools in each college's catchment area. Table 1 shows the distribution of institutions by LA.

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study as it allows participants more freedom when responding, and is a means of generating rich data (Silverman, 2010: 11; Payne and Payne, 2004: 133). The method of semi-structured interviews was selected as a means of collecting detailed data about participants' experiences, with an element of flexibility to explore matters raised by the interviewee (Warren, 2012: 132; Bryman, 2016: 467). Focus groups were selected in order to explore learners' attitudes, rationales and beliefs, with interaction between participants a means of stimulating fuller discussion (Jupp, 2006: 122–3). Questionnaires were also distributed to pupils at the beginning of focus groups, in order to collect demographic information about the participants and to triangulate the findings (Grinyer and Thomas, 2012: 248). There is greater emphasis in the results section on data from staff interviews. Since learners had not yet started college, they did not have direct experience of the models of presenting linguistic choice. However, they were still able to offer some valuable insights.¹⁰

The study followed the British Educational Research Association's (2018) ethical guidelines for education research, ensuring voluntary consent from participants, including consent from pupils' parents/carers, as well as consent from the heads of the institutions selected. The researcher ensured that participants were informed of the purpose and design of the research, including their right to withdraw from the study, and anonymity was ensured. Staff were given pseudonyms, and institutions assigned a letter. Individual pupils are not named, and are identified by the letter code assigned to their school. The data was analysed using the method of thematic analysis, following Kawulich's (2017: 22) definition. The transcripts were read, summarised and annotated, and the data was then coded inductively and deductively, using the software NVivo to facilitate the process.

Results

Participants described several models for presenting the choice of language medium to learners. The models were not formally labelled by the colleges in every instance, but for the purposes of this analysis, the models are categorised according to their common principles.

Opting in

A prominent model in the data was that of ‘opting in’. This consisted of giving learners the choice to study through Welsh or bilingually by asking them if they wished to do so, through a registration form or a conversation with a lecturer. If a learner did not choose to opt in, the default option would be to follow English-medium provision. This model operated on the level of the individual learner, rather than the whole class, but presupposed a designated Welsh or bilingual group. ‘Asking’ learners was an essential part of this model. Lucie (College B), for example, asks learners from Welsh schools if they wish to study through Welsh or bilingually, or if they wish to have Welsh worksheets. Odette (College C) noted that she produces Welsh slides and resources if learners ask for them, while Henri (College B) asks learners if they wish to be assessed through Welsh. A pupil from School S noted *‘They offer an interview and they ask different questions, which language is best [as a medium of teaching for the learner].’¹¹

A few participants discussed examples of the model’s success. Some pupils from School D noted that they would appreciate the offer of studying bilingually:

*It gives me a chance to have my work printed out in English and in Welsh ... because they know I speak Welsh. / Yes, the college was good with that, asking if you want Welsh or English.

However, there were many instances of the failure of ‘asking’ learners in increasing the number studying through Welsh and bilingually. There were examples of this from the college’s very first contact with learners. Fleur (College Ch) explained that learners declare their ability in Welsh on their college application forms, but do not choose to study through the language:

*On the application form, there’s a box ‘do you want the provision’ ... ‘are you first language [Welsh]’, ‘yes or no’; ‘can you read’; ‘can you speak’; ‘can you write’ ... in the Welsh language. Sometimes, ‘yes’, ‘yes’, ‘yes’. ‘Do you want to study bilingually?’ ‘No’.

A problem that staff did not seem to consider, was the potential influence of the lecturer who conducted the conversation with the learner about their choice of language medium, including staff who are not convinced of the value of studying through Welsh or bilingually. One example of this was Simone (College C). When asked if there were any benefits to learners of studying through Welsh or bilingually, she responded *‘It’s a bonus, but I don’t think it will make any difference to the students if we do it bilingually or not.’

There was some discussion by staff of the reasons why the model of ‘opting in’ does not succeed in increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh or bilingually. Lise (College Ch) alluded to learners’ age, their desire for independence and the freedom to make their own choices, including the linguistic medium of their courses. Rémy (College Ch) argued that this freedom to choose is part of the new experience of going to college. This sentiment was echoed by pupils from School Dd who described going to college as follows: *‘It’s all a change from normal, which can be nice. Because it can give you a kind of independence.’ Only one member of staff, however, showed an awareness of how choice architecture, and friction costs in particular, were hindering the model’s success. Reflecting on the models of opting in and opting out, Lise (College Ch) noted: *‘It’s easier to get them to opt out, than it is to get them to opt in [to Welsh/bilingual provision].’ As a result of the failures of the opt-in model, staff expressed a tension between the principle of giving learners a choice and promoting studying through Welsh and bilingually: *‘it’s getting the balance between saying “you can speak English, you can do that, but you can still do the odd module in Welsh”, it’s a complicated thing’ (Nathalie, College B).

An important element of the opt-in model, linked to asking learners, was raising learners’ awareness of the opportunities to study through Welsh, presupposing that this would convince them to do so. However, this technique was no more successful in increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually. Emmeline (College A), for example, reminds learners of the opportunity to study bilingually, ‘welcoming’ them to study through Welsh, *‘I say “remember this is a bilingual course, and you’re welcome to do something in Welsh.”’ The learners, however, do not choose to do so. Some learners noted that the opportunity to study through Welsh and bilingually was not always presented to them as equally or attractively as studying through English. A pupil from School AN recounted their experience with a prospective

lecturer on a visit to college, ★‘When I went there, she said “you could do it in Welsh, but I’d rather teach you in English.”’ A learner from School E noted that they felt awkward about choosing Welsh-medium provision in college, ★‘You feel like you’re making it harder for them, mess them about. If you want to do it in Welsh, you can stay in school.’

Another important aspect of the opt-in model was encouraging learners to study part of their course, or their whole course, through Welsh. Fleur (College Ch) noted that staff encourage learners to complete an assessment, or part of an assessment in Welsh, building up from an oral task to a written task. Several lecturers noted that they target specific learners who speak Welsh. They noted that learners are encouraged to complete a unit of a course in Welsh (Simone, College C), group work (Lise, College Ch) or part of a presentation (Rémy, College Ch). An essential part of the strategy of encouraging learners was giving them information about the advantages of studying through Welsh and bilingually, and the advantages of Welsh in the workplace. In College Ch, this begins when learners visit the college, before starting their studies. Rémy emphasised the importance of communicating this information, ‘We can provide the product for them, but whether they actually want to be in the Welsh-only group ... I think it’s a case of selling the benefits.’ However, staff continued to contrast discourses of encouraging, forcing and choice, arguing that there is a fine line between encouraging learners and putting pressure on them. As Fleur summarised, the most important principle remained learners’ right to choose: ★‘there’s a place for me, but then you have to get the balance right with respect to encouraging, but not forcing. Our students must have a choice.’ This was an important theme amongst the learners. A pupil from School S noted, ★‘Everyone should have an option: everyone who wants to do English, do English, and everyone who wants to do Welsh, do Welsh.’ Once again, encouraging learners did not sufficiently increase the number studying through Welsh or bilingually, as Odette (College C) noted, ‘It’s very difficult to persuade them that this would be a good thing to do.’

Opting out

The contrasting model was that of ‘opting out’. This consisted of defaulting Welsh learners into a designated Welsh or bilingual group, giving them the right to opt out into English-medium provision should they wish to do so. This model was less prevalent in the data but there were some examples in College Ch, in the fields of sport and agriculture, where there were higher

numbers of Welsh learners. Staff described some examples of the success of the model in these subjects. Rémy, for example, commented on the learners following default Welsh-medium sports provision, 'they enjoy it, and they're thankful for it'. Following this success, the college was planning to extend the model across other departments.

Staff showed some awareness of the qualities that contributed to the success of the model of opting out. Lise (College Ch) recognised the power of defaults, acknowledging that setting Welsh provision as the default option inverts the situation whereby English is the norm, 'we set the norm before beginning'. She showed awareness of how this model uses friction costs in favour of Welsh. The power of defaults was discussed most in the context of recruiting learners who don't feel strongly enough about the language to opt in to Welsh or bilingual provision, but would not opt out of such provision if it were the default. Simone (College C) noted, for example, 'they're just on the fence because we don't offer it, and they don't choose it'. This attitude was particularly prevalent in School Dd. In regards to language medium, one pupil noted 'I don't really care ... because as long as I know what they're talking about, I can use it.' Lise emphasised the importance of using Welsh from the first contact with learners, for example, in college open evenings, to ensure the success of the model:

*it's a natural step that those students will go into the Welsh-medium or bilingual group. And so it happens, without it becoming a question to the prospective student, and they find themselves in the Welsh or bilingual group.

The importance of using Welsh from the first contact with learners was echoed by some of the participants in the focus groups. A quote from a pupil at School AL shows the importance of a first impression regarding language medium, 'When I went to the open evening, the college, the course is in English.' Rémy echoed this, noting the importance of conducting college entry interviews in Welsh for learners from Welsh and bilingual schools.

Another positive attribute of the opt-out model that staff discussed was that it respected learners' right to choose. Staff emphasised that the purpose of the model was not to force learners to follow Welsh or bilingual provision, and that learners could choose to change from the default provision if they so wished. Lise explained, 'Of course they have a right to say "no, I don't want to study in Welsh" ... we deal with that through the opt out system.' College Ch framed this as promoting the learners' best interests, portraying Welsh as a skill akin to other skills that are given to learners without question:

*But do students, or young people aged 16 really know what they need? ... We don't ask them 'do you want us to develop your literacy, do you want us to develop your numeracy?' We just develop it. So that's what we're trying maybe to embed in the college with respect to Welsh ... we're going to develop their Welsh skills, whether they want to or not.

Integrating elements of Welsh/bilingual provision

In contrast to the model of opting out, which presupposed a designated Welsh or bilingual group, some lecturers included elements of Welsh or bilingual provision in every lecture. The aim was to deliver some Welsh or bilingual provision to every learner. The model was most prominent in colleges A and Ch. Diane (College A) noted that this bilingualism is 'natural', *'They come to do a core subject, and naturally as part of that, they're going to have a certain amount of Welsh as well.' Rémy (College Ch) echoed this in the context of his college, 'the bilingual provision just happens naturally'. Lise (College Ch) explained that there was an expectation from learners in certain subject areas such as child care and health and social that there would be an element of Welsh provision. This stemmed from learners experiencing the value of the language during the work placements that were integral parts of their courses. Pupils from School C argued that this was the case for health and social, *'Lots of people in hospital at the moment are old people, but the majority of them speak Welsh, and that's their first language, so speaking Welsh will be an advantage.'

In contrast to the opt-in model, learners' choice was not a prominent consideration in this model. It was driven, rather, by the college's targets and policies of increasing Welsh-medium and bilingual provision. When Rose (College B) was asked if there was demand from learners for the Welsh module she delivers, she responded, *'I don't know because we've just given it to them. We know that they have to do it, and it works.' Another underpinning principle of the model was, once again, promoting the learners' best interests; in particular, a desire to equip learners with the necessary skills to live and work in a bilingual society. Lise (College Ch) explained, *'that's the reality, we live in a bilingual society, and we want to give them that experience'. Many pupils seemed to be aware of this, for example, a pupil from School C noted, *'People in jobs across Wales like people who are bilingual.'

Participants recounted some success stories of including elements of Welsh or bilingual provision in every lecture. This included an increase in

the number of learners completing assessments through Welsh (Lise, College Ch), learners from English schools gaining confidence in Welsh (Diane, College A) and fostering positive attitudes towards Welsh and bilingual provision (Gabrielle, College Ch). However, one factor that contributed to the success of the model was a high proportion of Welsh speakers in a class. Colleges A and Ch are both situated in areas with high proportions of Welsh speakers. Pascale's (College A) comment about the learners in her college crystallises why this model is a viable option in these colleges, *'they all speak Welsh anyway'.

Discussion

Some members of staff framed defaulting learners into Welsh-medium and bilingual provision as promoting learners' best interests, justifying this by portraying Welsh as a skill and emphasising the need for experience of bilingualism in order to thrive in a bilingual society. This is an example of libertarian paternalism. As discussed, it can be difficult to prove conclusively that studying through Welsh or bilingually is of benefit to young people, but for the reasons outlined above, this article assumes this to be true. Behavioural economics offers several principles for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the different models of language choice presented in the data, in increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually in FE.

Choice architecture

The data clearly shows that the model of opting in and 'asking' learners if they wish to follow Welsh or bilingual provision is not succeeding in significantly increasing the numbers that do so, in the context of provision, assessment or resources. However, the offer appealed to a very small number of learners in the data. A fundamental flaw is the lack of consideration of choice architecture and its inevitable effect on learners' choices (Thaler and Sunstein, 2003: 177). Despite the model's obvious failure, only one member of staff considered that the way in which the choice is presented to learners can contribute to this failure. There is a need, therefore, for an education policy that shifts the emphasis from 'asking' learners to modifying choice architecture. Bradbury, McGimpsey and Santori (2013: 254) summarise the importance of doing so:

Within the terms of this behaviourist/policy discourse, a policy-maker that provides mechanisms for making choices and ensures access to information with which to make choices, cannot but be aware that the choices made will be affected by the way in which the mechanism is designed, how information is presented, if and how feedback on prior choices is given, who presents information and so on.

Some members of staff (Diane, College A and Rémy, College Ch) felt that Welsh and bilingual provision occurred ‘naturally’, suggesting that there is no need to consider choice architecture. However, this argument does not take into account factors that determine this perception of ‘naturalness’, such as the number of learners and staff in a college that speak Welsh, the number of Welsh speakers in an area and an institution’s ethos. Although the strategy of integrating elements of Welsh and bilingual provision succeeded to an extent in colleges A and Ch, it is unlikely that it could evolve in other colleges that do not have as high a proportion of Welsh-speaking learners and staff in the institutions and in their feeder areas. This reinforces the need for policymakers to plan strategically, through modifying choice architecture.

The role of the messenger

One element of choice architecture that an education strategy needs to modify is the conversation between lecturer and learner – asking if they wish to study through Welsh. This places much responsibility on an individual who may not be equipped to conduct such a conversation, leading to presenting the message in an ad-hoc way. There is a need for colleges to train staff regarding what to say, how to say it, and what not to say. Estyn (2017: 14) acknowledge the current problem: ‘The majority of staff in colleges have not received enough training on how to explain to prospective learners from Welsh-medium secondary schools the advantages of following courses through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.’ There is also a need for colleges to recognise the influence of the ‘messenger’ who communicates the information (BIT, 2010: 19). People are influenced by the perceived authority of the messenger, and demographic similarities between the messenger and the recipient can improve the effectiveness of an intervention (BIT, 2010: 19). The relationship between a learner and a lecturer, or lack of significant relationship at the time of making a decision, can therefore significantly influence choice. In addition, such a conversation takes place within the hierarchy of learner and lecturer, and unequal power relations, as Clapham (2012: 160) notes. If a member of staff has an

indifferent attitude towards Welsh and bilingual provision, it is likely that this will influence learners' choices in a negative way. Staff also need to be aware of how they frame a message: the nuances used when presenting the choice, body language and the institutional narrative which can all push a learner in a specific direction (Government Communication Network, 2009: 23). Pupils highlighted instances of individuals presenting the 'choice' of studying through Welsh in a completely unequal way, framing it as something that would be more troublesome for staff. This presents another barrier to learners and demands substantial strength of character to make such a choice, especially considering the power relationship between learners and lecturers.

Colleges need to consider when these conversations take place, remembering the importance of a timely intervention (BIT, 2014: 37). Another weakness of the current model is that it is arguably too late to ask learners about their choice of language medium once they have already started at college, with possible preconceptions about language already formed. Using Welsh as the default language from the first contact with learners, as Lise and Rémy (College Ch) suggested, would be a means of overcoming this problem.

Eliminating friction costs

Another important aspect of choice architecture that any successful model for increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually needs to take into account, is friction costs. The opt-in model does not consider the negative impact of friction costs on learners who wish to follow Welsh or bilingual provision. Although learners are given a choice to study through Welsh, it is their responsibility as individuals to act on that choice, while they do not need to act in order to receive the default English provision. Behavioural economists believe that desired behaviour should be 'easy' (BIT, 2010: 9). The opt-in model, however, demands extra effort of learners to choose Welsh or bilingual provision. The BIT (2014: 9) summarises the problem with friction costs: 'small, seemingly irrelevant details that make a task more challenging or effortful (what we call 'friction costs') can make the difference between doing something and putting it off – sometimes indefinitely'.

This corresponds with findings from research on the use of Welsh services. One obstacle to the use of health, social and criminal services in Welsh in Madoc-Jones, Parry and Hughes' study (2012: 255–6) is having

to ask for Welsh provision. Similarly, Citizens Advice Bureau's research (2015: 35) notes that the extra effort required by Welsh speakers to use a website in Welsh prevents them from doing so. The report concludes, 'Having to seek out or "opt in" to a Welsh language service serves as a deterrent to take up of Welsh services' (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2015: 53). Griffith (2018: 201–11) also notes that the extra effort required in order to use Welsh technology impedes its use.

Desirable behaviour should also be 'social' (BIT, 2014: 29). The opt-in model, however, requires learners to go against the grain, against their peers, during a time of change, which is another friction cost. While staff were not expected to discuss friction costs in such terms, only one lecturer (Lise, College Ch) showed an awareness of factors that make the opt-out model more effective than the opt-in model, in increasing the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually. It is essential that policy-makers are aware of the influence of friction costs in preventing learners from choosing Welsh and bilingual provision. There is a need for colleges to adopt a model that eliminates such costs or uses them in favour of Welsh.

Changing defaults

One means of eliminating friction costs is through changing the default language of provision by placing learners from Welsh and bilingual schools in Welsh or bilingual groups, giving them the choice to opt out of the provision if they wish. Contrary to the opt-in model, defaulting learners to Welsh or bilingual provision inverts the current situation making Welsh or bilingual provision the norm, drawing on the power of the anchoring heuristic and the status quo bias (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974: 1128–30; Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988: 37). It also uses friction costs to the advantage of Welsh, as extra effort is required of learners in order to change to English provision, while following Welsh or bilingual provision happens without the need to act. Both staff and pupils acknowledged the importance of the default language that is used from initial contact with learners.

The opt-out model still respects the learner's right to choose, through the opt-out clause. As staff explained, the aim of the model is not to force learners to study through Welsh or bilingually; rather it is an example of libertarian paternalism, with an emphasis on the libertarian aspect. It therefore satisfies the learners' desire to have the option to choose and also their sense of freedom and independence. As Thaler and Sunstein (2003b: 29) explain, 'so long as it is costless or nearly costless to depart from the

default plan, minimal paternalism is maximally libertarian'. The opt-out clause should eliminate potential criticism that such a model could be a 'slippery slope' leading to enforcing specific behaviour. In Thaler and Sunstein's words, 'the libertarian condition, requiring opt-out rights, sharply limits the steepness of the slope' (2003b: 40).

There are many examples of success in using defaults to achieve policy objectives: increasing organ donations (Johnson and Goldstein, 2003), increasing people's savings (Madrian and Shea, 2001; Thaler and Bernartzi, 2004) and increasing participation in pension schemes (Campbell, 2013). Although these studies are situated in a different context to language choice, there is also a precedent for exploring the power of defaults in the context of language planning. Keegan and Evas (2012: 45) highlight the power of the default language option in the context of technology, noting that setting the default language of software in a majority language prevents its use in a minority language. The authors recommend setting the default language of web page content to Welsh in order to use the power of defaults in favour of the minority language (Keegan and Evas, 2012: 49). The Citizens Advice Bureau (2015: 49–50, 15) found that setting English as the default language of provision hinders users from using Welsh services and recommends setting Welsh as the default language for some services. Elias (2017: 300) found that defaulting students from Welsh schools onto Welsh-medium provision succeeded in increasing the number studying through Welsh in universities.

In the data collected for this study, the opt-out model succeeded in departments where there were high numbers of Welsh-speaking learners and staff. Such a model presupposes staff capacity to teach through Welsh and bilingually. While this is true in some colleges in certain areas, this is not the case across Wales. In order to implement this model, therefore, it would be necessary to increase staff ability and confidence to teach through Welsh and bilingually. However, this is inevitable in order to implement any model that seeks to increase the number of learners studying through Welsh or bilingually. The implementation of such a model in practice would vary between different colleges, and different areas. In some colleges, this could mean defaulting learners to one or two Welsh or bilingual modules. In other colleges, this would mean defaulting learners to Welsh or bilingual provision for a significant part of their course. The same principles, however, would underpin such models.

The limitations of giving information

Another failure of the opt-in model, which behavioural economics can help explain, is over-dependency on giving information as a means of changing behaviour. In this model, conveying information regarding the advantages of studying through Welsh and bilingually, raising awareness of the opportunities to do so and encouraging learners to follow such provision were the main techniques used. There was a strong belief in the data that communicating the advantages of studying through Welsh and bilingually to learners was the panacea that would increase the number choosing to do so. This presupposes that currently learners do not fully understand such advantages but this does not concur with the findings of research (Davies and Davies, 2015; Davies, 2019). The data showed the limited effect of giving information to change behaviour. Fogg et al. (2010: 8) explain that giving information presupposes that people choose in a completely rational manner. One of the mistakes in seeking to change behaviour, therefore, is '[b]elieving that information leads to action' (Fogg et al., 2010: 8). Christmas et al. (2009: 32) adds that merely giving information can widen the gap between different types of learners: 'There is ... a risk associated with the provision of information in the absence of other interventions: namely that it can worsen inequalities between those who want to know how to change their behaviour, and those who don't.'

Another limitation of the technique of encouraging learners to study through Welsh or bilingually was that it justified low targets, such as one learner studying one unit through Welsh. This will not significantly increase the number of learners studying through Welsh or bilingually. A specific problem with encouraging learners to use Welsh only as part of group work or a presentation, is the danger of creating diglossia, with Welsh seen as merely a spoken language, and English the suitable language for formal, written tasks.¹²

Giving information can lay a foundation for changing behaviour. However, there is also a need for further interventions, such as changing defaults. The Government Communication Network (2009: 15) summarises this: 'Knowledge and awareness are rarely enough by themselves to bring about behaviour change ... Providing information is therefore the first step towards influencing behaviour rather than an end point.'

However, in the context of post-compulsory education in *Cymraeg 2050* (Welsh Government, 2017: 41), the emphasis, once again, is on communicating the advantages of studying through Welsh.

The FE sector has a critical role to play in realising the Welsh Government's target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. This article contributes to understanding the ways in which choice of language medium is presented to learners and the influence of such models on their choices. It demonstrates the need for policymakers to adopt a libertarian paternalistic approach by modifying choice architecture to increase the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually. It shows how the power of default options and friction costs can be used in favour of Welsh, ensuring that following Welsh and bilingual provision is easy and accessible to learners. Adopting such an intervention more widely could contribute to transforming the place of Welsh and bilingualism in the FE sector in Wales.

Notes

- 1 In the rest of this article, 'through the medium of Welsh' is written as 'through Welsh', for reasons of brevity.
- 2 The Further Education sector in Wales, as in England, refers to the two years following statutory education, post-16. Depending on the options available, learners can choose to study in sixth forms or at an FE college. In this article, the term 'FE' is used to encompass both sixth forms and FE colleges, but does not include apprenticeships or work-based learning.
- 3 In 2016/17, 5.2 per cent of learning activities in Further Education institutions were taught through the medium of Welsh or bilingually (Welsh Government, 2019: 16).
- 4 The Coleg Cymraeg was founded in 2011, with the aim of increasing the opportunities for students to study through Welsh in Higher Education. The Coleg Cymraeg currently works through branches located in eight universities in Wales.
- 5 Since 2007, schools in Wales are categorised according to how much Welsh is used as part of teaching and learning (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Secondary schools are divided into four categories, two of which are 'Welsh-medium' and 'bilingual'. The 'bilingual' category is subdivided into four subcategories, one of which is bilingual 2A, where at least 80 per cent of subjects apart from Welsh and English are taught through the medium of Welsh.
- 6 The Bilingual Champions project began in 2005 as a pilot scheme. By 2013, the project was extended to every FE college in Wales. The aims of the Bilingual Champion include enabling colleges to develop and implement a strategy to increase Welsh-medium and bilingual provision, and increase the number of learners following such provision (Arad, 2014: 13).

- 7 The study sought to ensure a range of staff who used different amounts of Welsh or bilingual provision as part of their course, although this was difficult to ascertain.
- 8 It was not possible to conduct a focus group in School AP, therefore focus groups were conducted in two other schools in LA 1.
- 9 Due to schools' lack of availability, only one additional focus group was conducted in LA 4.
- 10 A more detailed exploration of learners' perspectives can be found in Davies (2019, 2020).
- 11 Participants were given the choice to be interviewed in English or Welsh. For the purpose of this article, Welsh quotes have been translated into English. Translated quotes are marked with an asterisk and the original quotes can be found in the Appendix.
- 12 Diglossia is defined as a situation where two languages are used in a speech community. One language is used for 'high' functions, for example in the church, and the other language is used for 'low' functions, such as in the home (Meyerhoff, 2006: 108).

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Appendix

'Maen nhw'n cynnig *interview* a maen nhw'n gofyn gwahanol cwestiynau, pa iaith ydy'r gorau [fel cyfrwng addysgu i'r dysgwyr].' (School S)

'Mae'n rhoi siawns i fi i gael gwaith fi wedi *printo* mas yn Saesneg a Cymraeg ... oherwydd ro'n nhw'n gwybod bod fi'n siarad Cymraeg. / Ie, roedd coleg yn dda gyda hwnna, yn gofyn ti moen Cymraeg neu Saesneg.' (School D)

'Ar y ffurflen gais, mae bocsa liecech chi gael y ddarpariaeth ... ife iaith gyntaf, ie neu na; ydych chi'n gallu darllen; ydych chi'n gallu siarad; 'dach chi'n gallu ysgrifennu ... yn yr iaith Gymraeg. Ambell waith, ie, ie, ie. Ydych chi moen astudio'n ddwyieithog? Na.' (Fleur, College Ch)

'Bonws yw e, ond dw i ddim yn credu bydd e'n gwneud unrhyw wahaniaeth i'r myfyrwyr os ni'n neud e'n ddwyieithog neu na.' (Simone, College C)

'Mae gyd yn newid i'r arfer, sy'n gallu bod yn neis. Oherwydd mae'n gallu rhoi *kind of independence* i ti.' (School Dd)

'Mae e'n haws cael nhw i optio allan, nag yw e i gael nhw i optio mewn [i ddarpariaeth Gymraeg/ddwyieithog].' (Lise, College Ch)

'mae cael y cydbwysedd rhwng dweud "gelli di siarad Saesneg, gelli di wneud hynny, ond gelli di dal wneud ambell i fodiwl trwy'r Gymraeg", mae'n rhywbeth cymhleth.' (Nathalie, College B)

'Dw i'n dweud "cofiwch mae hyn yn gwrs dwyieithog, a chroeso i chi wneud rhywbeth yn Gymraeg.'" (Emmeline, College A)

'Pan es i fynd yna, 'oddd hi'n ddweud, "set ti'n gallu neud o'n Gymraeg, ond 'sai'n well gen i ddysgu ti'n Saesneg.'" (School AN)

'Ti'n teimlo ti'n neud e'n mwy anodd i nhw, *mess them about*. Os ti eisiau neud e'n Cymraeg, ti'n gallu aros yn yr ysgol.' (School E)

'mae lle i fi, ond wedyn mae 'da chi sut i gael y cydbwysedd yn iawn o ran hybu, ond dim gorfodi. Mae rhaid bod dewis 'da myfyrwyr ni hefyd.' (Fleur, College Ch)

'Dyle fod pawb yn cael opsiwn; pawb sydd eisiau neud Saesneg, neud Saesneg, a phawb sydd eisiau neud Cymraeg, neud Cymraeg.' (School S)

'yn ni'n gosod y norm cyn dechrau.' (Lise, College Ch)

'maen nhw jest ar y ffens achos ni ddim yn offro fe, a dydyn nhw ddim yn dewis e.' (Simone, College Ch)

'cam naturiol yw bod y myfyriwr 'na'n mynd mewn i'r grŵp cyfrwng Cymraeg neu ddwyieithog. Ac felly mae'n digwydd, heb fod e'n dod yn gwestiwn i'r darpar

fyfyrwr, ac felly maen nhw'n ffeindio eu hunain yn y grŵp Cymraeg neu ddwyieithog.' (Lise, College Ch)

'Pan on i 'di mynd i'r noson agored, mae'r coleg, mae'r cwrs yn Saesneg.' (School AL)

'Wrth gwrs mae hawl 'da nhw i ddweud "na, dw i ddim yn astudio yn Gymraeg" ... ni'n delio 'da 'ny trwy'r system optio mas.' (Lise, College Ch)

'Ond ydy myfyrwr, neu bobl ifanc 16 oed gwir yn gwybod beth sydd angen arnyn nhw? ... 'Dyn ni ddim yn gofyn iddyn nhw, "ydych chi moen i ni ddatblygu'ch llythrennedd chi, ydych chi moen i ni ddatblygu'ch rhifedd chi?" Ni jest yn ei ddatblygu fe. Felly dyna beth 'yn ni'n trial falle mewnosod yn y coleg o ran y Gymraeg ... ni mynd i ddatblygu eu sgiliau Cymraeg, pe bai nhw moen neu pe bai nhw ddim eisiau.' (Lise, College Ch)

'Maen nhw'n dŵad i neud y pwnc craidd, ac yn naturiol fel rhan o hynny, maen nhw'n mynd i gael rhywfaint o ddarpariaeth Gymraeg hefyd.' (Diane, College A)

'Mae llawer o bobl sydd yn yr ystyby ar y foment yn pobl hen, ond mae mwyafrif ohonynt yn siarad Cymraeg, a hwnna yw iaith cyntaf nhw, felly bydd siarad Cymraeg yn mantais.' (School C)

'Dw i ddim yn gwybod achos ni jest 'di roi e iddyn nhw. Ni'n gwybod bod rhaid iddyn nhw neud e, ac mae e'n gweithio.' (Rose, College B)

'dyna beth yw'r realiti, ni'n byw mewn cymdeithas ddwyieithog, a ni eisiau rhoi'r profiad 'na iddyn nhw.' (Lise, College Ch)

'Mae pobl yn swyddi ar draws Cymru yn hoffi pobl sydd yn ddwyieithog.' (School C)

'maen nhw gyd yn siarad Cymraeg beth bynnag.' (Pascale, College A)

