



Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Prisons in Wales and treatment of Welsh offenders](#), HC 113

Thursday 5 February 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 5 February 2015.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Society\)](#)
- [Comisiynydd y Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Commissioner\)](#)

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: David T. C. Davies (Chair); Glyn Davies; Nia Griffith; Mrs Siân C. James

Questions 158-188

Witnesses: **Heledd Williams** and **Cen Llwyd**, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society), gave evidence.

Q158 Chair: (*Translation*): Thank you very much, Heledd Williams and Cen Llwyd, for attending today to talk about the status of the Welsh language in the prison system. How do things differ for a Welsh-speaking prisoner held in a prison in England compared with one held in Wales? How does England compare with Wales in that respect?

Cen Llwyd: (*Translation*) Thank you for the invitation to attend the Committee. To answer the question bluntly, I do not see that much difference in terms of the Welsh language between what happens in prisons in Wales and what happens in prisons in England.

Perhaps I should put things in context. My name is Cen and I am deputy chair of communication for Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, the Welsh Language Society. I have been a member since the end of the 1960s. To be honest, the chair of the Welsh Language Society, Jamie Bevan, should be here today, but he is unable to be because of work commitments. He has direct experience of incarceration in the past two years, whereas my experience was many years before that.

I think I first went to prison in 1978, to Swansea prison. I went three or four more times, to Swansea on each occasion. Since then, I visit prisoners—not members of the

Welsh Language Society, but in my day-to-day work, I am a minister, so I have that experience of visiting prisoners.

On one occasion, when I was imprisoned in Swansea, my wife was also imprisoned, in Pucklechurch in Bristol, because that was the nearest suitable location. When we left prison, we compared notes. We did not see that there was very much difference in so far as the Welsh language was concerned.

That was during the 1970s. Unfortunately, since then, in my experience and that of Jamie Bevan and Osian Jones—they also work for the Welsh Language Society and we have that evidence—there is not much difference as far as the Welsh language is concerned. There are possibly other differences, but in terms of the Welsh language we have not seen much difference at all.

Indeed, Jamie told us that during his time in prison he was threatened at one point because he refused to sign a form that was available only in English. He was told that if he did not fill in the forms, first, he would perhaps not be allowed visits from his family and, secondly, perhaps he would not get food and would have to eat something else—I will not quote what was actually said to him in a place like this, but the experience was not pleasant. Someone like Jamie has very strong and principled ideas, but I can imagine that, for a more ordinary prisoner—if I may use that term—that could be seen as quite a threat.

To answer your question bluntly, from our experience, I do not see so much difference between what happens in Wales and what happens in England.

Q159 Chair: *(Translation)* You alluded to second-hand reports of prison officers preventing prisoners from speaking Welsh in prisons. Is there any direct evidence of that, apart from the example you just gave?

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* I don't think I said that officers stopped people speaking Welsh. I said that the individual was not willing to sign a document that was available in English only. The individual wanted a Welsh-language version of the document. There is a slight difference.

Q160 Chair: *(Translation)* Yes, I understand that. Apart from forms, have officers stopped prisoners speaking to each other in Welsh at all, in England or in Wales?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* There are reports such as the one by Cwmni Iaith on the justice system in north Wales, in which there are a number of examples of people being prevented from speaking Welsh to each other. In terms of prisons and the situation that prisoners are in, from my understanding, the Welsh Language Society has not received any direct report of anyone being prevented from communicating in Welsh with a fellow prisoner or on the phone, but there were reports in the press about a

young man from Caernarfon who was barred from using Welsh on the telephone with his young daughter, who was too young to understand English.

From the point of view of prisoners, officers are in a position of power over them. If prisoners are there for many years, how are they to make complaints? They don't have access to the internet, so they couldn't contact the Welsh Language Commissioner to complain, and perhaps they would not even be aware that there was a complaints procedure available to them outwith the prison institution. If you are in prison, you might worry about kicking up a fuss and complaining to the prison authorities themselves. Although Cymdeithas yr Iaith has not received direct reports related to this question, it is perhaps happening and I could understand why we did not hear about it.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Heledd has an interest in this field. She has undertaken some research work and has had personal family experience of the situation. I should point out that there is a magazine called *Inside Time*, and in the most recent edition, from January—

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* It was put in the archive in January but it was actually published last May.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Sorry. It has only just come to our attention. There is a report from a prisoner talking about a similar experience to the one you just mentioned: “someone in prison was banned from talking to his own son on the phone because he could only speak Welsh.” That is an example of something that has happened.

Q161 Chair: *(Translation)* Wrexham council has described Parc prison as a model of good practice in supporting the use of the Welsh language in the prison system. Do you agree with that view?

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* I myself have not had any experience of Parc prison. I have been outside the prison—I was accompanying somebody who was visiting someone—but I haven't been inside. Of course, it is a private prison as opposed to the other prisons in Wales, in Swansea and Cardiff. I cannot answer you specifically on the position of the Welsh language in Parc prison.

Q162 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons has referred to inadequacies in Welsh language provision in educational settings in prisons in Wales. What is your experience of that? What is happening at the moment—do you have any evidence about what is happening now in terms of weaknesses of provision in this area?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* I have a relative in prison. One thing they have talked about—I do not know whether you will remember this—was that about two years ago they reduced the number of television channels that prisoners could view. S4C was one of the channels that was cut. At about the time that happened, my relative moved from one prison to another, so he was not certain whether they had limited the number of

channels that prisoners could view and so the same thing was happening in England and Wales—perhaps whether S4C is available in the prisons in England is something to consider—or whether he could not see it because the Government had decided, for whatever reason, that they did not want prisoners to watch as many television channels.

Another thing is that, recently, my relative said that they had received quite a few new books in prison—it did not previously have a very good choice of books. I do not know whether this is true of every prison. For example, Osian Jones stated that Altcourse prison has a very good choice of Welsh books. He said that when he was in prison in 2010, the choice of books was fine, but that was because the chaplain—a Welsh-speaking member of staff—had made an effort to ensure there was a good choice of Welsh language books. So, in terms of the women sent from Wales to Eastwood Park prison, we just do not know whether this is a bit of a postcode lottery.

Q163 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* Is it possible for all Welsh speakers to have an opportunity to develop and improve their basic skills? I am talking about people who may have difficulties, as many people in prison have.

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* One thing Osian Jones noted was that when you arrived at Altcourse prison, you were given IQ tests to ascertain your educational needs. He said that all of that was done through the medium of English, which might place those who have received all their education through the medium of Welsh at a disadvantage—in a way, it is not fair. Osian and others I have spoken to have said that the curriculum in England is the English curriculum. Although GCSE Welsh is compulsory in Wales, it is not possible to study for it in Altcourse or Stoke Heath. Osian Jones could not see how you could study for a degree in Welsh if a member of the education department staff could not speak Welsh. He thought there was discrimination from the education point of view for Welsh prisoners.

Q164 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* If you were to draw up a plan to improve Welsh medium provision, what would your recommendations be to the prison authorities? What would the most important steps be?

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* To bring provision for the Welsh language into the 20th or 21st century. You must remember that Wales has its own language measure, and that should be implemented in prisons. The Chairman's first question was whether there are specific examples of people being prevented from speaking Welsh. I have not heard of anyone from the membership of the Welsh Language Society being in that position. But if the question is whether people feel uncomfortable about asking for, or demanding, the right to speak Welsh, such situations have arisen, as can also happen outwith the prison walls, of course. People feel they are making a nuisance of themselves, they feel rather nervous or whatever. A prisoner of strong views who had campaigned for the language, would be willing to fight for that, and are perhaps prepared to face that, but the very last thing that people who are not in for that kind of offence want to do—bear in mind that some of them might be ashamed of being in prison and absolutely detest the fact that they are there—is kick up a fuss, draw attention to themselves or make a

nuisance of themselves. Everybody says, “Head down, carry on and do your time so that you can get out.”

Q165 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* There has been talk of people wearing a badge that will indicate that they are Welsh speakers. These things may help.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* I think they would. I am not sure what has been happening in the past few years, but there should be a language option when the prisoner first comes into the prison. You have to fill in many things on the form. Perhaps there could be the question “What is your language of choice?” Then you could state: “My language of choice is such-and-such.”

This example is anecdotal, but there was again a person on the telephone, as in the quote from *Inside Time*. Because they suffered with a stammer, they did not feel comfortable speaking on the phone English; they felt much more comfortable speaking Welsh. The result was that they did not continue with the conversation, because they did not feel comfortable speaking English when they wanted to ring home. That was a prison outside Wales. Those examples make your hair stand on end, because we are talking about fundamental rights and how every person feels comfortable in dealing with their family and loved ones.

Q166 Mrs James: *(Translation)* I want to return to something that you said, Heledd, about women in prison. This is coming from left field in a way, because you did not mention it in your evidence, but do you believe, fundamentally, that prison is the right way to deal with female offenders in Wales? Do you think that we need a female prison in Wales?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* As regards all prisoners but particularly women, because of the effects on families, prison should not be used as a means of dealing with offenders. In the past 10 to 15 years or since the 1990s, the prison population has doubled, and we do not think that it is a way of supporting or helping people. That said, women who are sent to prison are often sent to places that are far away. How are their children meant to visit them? How can they maintain a relationship with their families? Many of the women have mental health issues; that is an additional problem. Prison is not necessarily the ideal method of dealing with offenders, but if the state wishes to incarcerate people, it should at least ensure that it is not a worse punishment depending on where they live. People from rural areas or who live far from prisons and their families have to suffer more.

Q167 Mrs James: *(Translation)* So perhaps we need to look at new ways of moving forward, particularly when it comes to women and families.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Siân’s question raises all sorts of scenarios and goes into a different subject, but it is horrifying when you hear of women being sent to prison and then giving birth in prison—the babies are born in prison.

Q168 Mrs James: *(Translation)* Yes, and sometimes the mother then has to stay in prison and the baby is sent away.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* It is a completely different issue, much broader than the one that we are discussing here. It poses questions for us about how society deals with offenders and law-breaking.

Q169 Glyn Davies: *(Translation)* I will ask my first question in English, if I may. I am not confident enough to explain exactly what I want to say in Welsh.

(Continued in English) The general thrust of what you have been saying is that you are in favour of smaller, more local prison places for young adult males, rather along the lines of what you have just said about women and children. I am just thinking about the practicalities. How small and how local should the prison facilities be to meet your objectives?

Heledd Williams:*(Translation)* I think it should be as small and local as possible. If it is not, how can prisoners feel that they can be reintegrated into their communities? If they are imprisoned many miles away, how can they retain their links with their families? That is an important part of reducing recidivism. I think the reason why they are building a prison for 2,100 people is to save money, but will it truly save money if it is a setting where people will not be rehabilitated and will go on to reoffend in the future? The last report, *Welsh Prisoners in the Prison Estate*, mentioned a medium-sized prison for 500 prisoners, but this is four times that size. Prisons such as HMP Oakwood and other similar-sized prisons are perhaps cheaper in the short term, but the cost to society will certainly be far greater, and the financial cost could also be higher, if you want to look at it in mainly financial terms. Wrexham is not especially local, particularly if you are using public transport, because to get to Wrexham on the train from Bangor, for example, you have to go to Chester first and then to Wrexham. The journey is only 20 minutes less than going to Liverpool, where the other nearest prison is. For many people who do not have cars, it is not as local as people have suggested.

Q170 Chair: *(Translation)* On that point, we do not live in an ideal or perfect world. If it is not possible to build small, local prisons, is it better to keep Welsh people in Wales, perhaps in Wrexham, rather than sending them to somewhere such as Liverpool?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* I do not think that that is a fair choice. You cannot say that there are two possible options. We do not live in a perfect world, but there is plenty of money for other things, so why could you not have funding for prisons?

Chair: *(Translation)* I am not sure.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* One has heard of people who have been moved as far as possible from their homes or where they have the strongest connections, which has made it very difficult for families to visit those individuals. It may mean a very long journey there and

back, perhaps taking a whole day, which makes it extremely difficult for visitors to go and see relatives or those close to them.

The purpose of prisons, I suppose, is to punish, but it is also to try to rehabilitate people, so that they come out as better individuals, perhaps having changed their ways. The package needed for that rehabilitation to work has to be comprehensive and include education and giving people respect and allowing them to use their own language, but it also requires that their families should be available to support them and that that should be relatively easy for them, but when one hears of someone who has to travel and pass a number of prisons to reach their relative, there is something wrong somewhere.

Q171 Glyn Davies: I agree with the principle, and particularly the help for rehab. It is hugely important that we focus on rehabilitation, and being near to families and a community that they know is a big part of that, but it is the practicalities we are looking at as a Committee. How local can you go? How small a community can you go to, because obviously it is more costly if you are dispersing facilities. That is the part I am interested in—the practicalities of how far you think we can go in having dispersed smaller prisons.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Well, I believe we have suggested a figure—not that we are experts in this field; not at all, and I emphasise that. All we are dealing with is the use of the Welsh language and the way in which that use is promoted. On the bigger picture of the process of making a person a better person, we do not claim to have the answers, but having been in prison myself and spoken to other inmates, when I heard them say, “The family lives too far away. They can’t come and see me at the next visit,” you could see their spirits deflate; they were getting into the pits of despair. I remember one person whose family lived in Bristol, so they had to go through Cardiff in order to visit that person in Swansea prison. I am not saying that you need six, seven, eight, or even a couple more prisons here and there, but even with the current system, there is a lot of snakes and ladders being played.

Q172 Glyn Davies: *(Translation)* I believe that the problem is in north-west Wales. It is far from Wrexham—I do not know whether people know that. Are there specific problems for people from north-west Wales, or is it the same kind of picture across the prison estate throughout the whole of Great Britain?

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Perhaps it is a generalisation, but on an anecdotal basis, I do not believe that it just happens in north Wales; it happens in other places too, but I may be wrong. I do not have any figures to prove the point. It was just a feeling.

Glyn Davies: *(Translation)* Thank you.

Q173 Mrs James: *(Translation)* In your written evidence you state that criminal justice should be devolved wholesale to Wales. In some other evidence we have received, we have heard that certain prisoners would still have to remain in prisons outwith Wales. You are talking about Welsh prisoners all being returned to Wales and incarcerated in Wales, but for

operational reasons they say that some will have to remain outside Wales. What is your view on that?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* I would have thought that if many prisoners have to remain in prisons in England, the same rules and linguistic rights should apply to them as is the case in Wales, because it is not their choice that they are being sent to prisons outwith Wales and they should not have to suffer in terms of language rights as a result. If it were statutory and practically doable, that should be the case. One thing Jamie Bevan mentioned was that there was a great lack of understanding among prison officers. Perhaps language awareness courses should be provided to them to ensure that wherever the prisoners are, they do not suffer in terms of their language rights.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* You mentioned coming back to Wales. We were arguing that it should be devolved—that is what we are referring to, isn't it? That the whole system should be devolved.

Q174 Mrs James: *(Translation)* Yes, as a whole.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Because, once again, from experience of dealing with some devolved Departments, they may be more willing to consider the position of the Welsh language in a different way, compared with those non-devolved organisations, which are more likely not to comply and perhaps are not as aware of the need where the Welsh language is concerned—bearing in mind that that is what we are here to discuss.

Q175 Mrs James: *(Translation)* What do you believe a distinctively Welsh prison system might look like? Do you have any idea about how that system would be distinct from a British system?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* I would hope that they would not imprison as many people and not use prison as a sticking plaster for deep social problems. The Howard League published a report on children in prison which made good points, saying that a Welsh system would not have to just emulate the English system, but that we have a totally different social situation in Wales and would deal with social problems in a different way.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Yes, it brings a different way of looking at things. I have been in prison twice because of non-payment of a fine. It was certainly not cost-effective. If I could use one other anecdote: my wife was sent from Aberaeron magistrates court to Bristol prison for five days—imagine the cost of taking her to Bristol. She had to find her own way back, of course. Because she is a woman, a police officer from Cardigan had to go down with her all the way from Aberaeron to Bristol. And how much was the fine? £13.

Q176 Chair: *(Translation)* If I could just interject, this is slightly beside the point. I agree that it is not cost-effective at all, but the point is: how can we encourage people to pay fines if

they do not wish to pay them or did not agree with them in the first place? Many people are imprisoned because the courts have tried all other avenues and nothing else has worked.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Yes, it is probably true that imprisonment is the easiest and swiftest option for non-payment of fines, but there are other methods available: through distress warrants, or by requiring people to do some sort of community service and so on. I have not studied the law in sufficient detail, but I do not think that those options are properly taken into account for non-payment of fines. I am not talking about the punishment; I am talking about non-payment of fines. There are many people in prison because of non-payment of fines.

Q177 Mrs James: *(Translation)* What is your view of the establishment of—to use a completely English phrase—“separate legal jurisdiction” in Wales?

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* I would agree that it would enable us to have a more devolved view that would better suit the needs of the people of Wales.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Yes, that is simply our stance on that.

Chair: *(Translation)* Well, we expected that anyway. It would have been weird if you had said anything different.

Mrs James: *(Translation)* It was quite a mouthful in English.

Chair: May I thank you both for your attendance here today and for how you have presented your evidence? It was very interesting. I am sorry that we did not have more time to go into the other aspects of the issue, but unfortunately we have to stay focused on the subject of the Welsh language in prison.

Cen Llwyd: *(Translation)* Thank you for inviting us.

Heledd Williams: *(Translation)* Thank you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Meri Huws** and **Huw Gapper**, Comisiynydd y Gymraeg (Welsh Language Commissioner), gave evidence.

Q178 Chair: *(Translation)* Good afternoon, Meri. How are you, Mr Gapper? Nice to see you both. We know each other very well. Thank you both for coming today. I will start in English.

(Continued in English) Of particular interest to me as a member of the Council of Europe is what is the UK's current position in terms of its commitments under the European convention on human rights and the European charter for regional or minority languages?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* Thank you for that question. Are those charters of great use to us? I do not know, but I will refer specifically to how those two actually take account of these issues. First, as you know, the UK Government have signed up to certain elements of the European charter for regional or minority languages, of which article 10, if memory serves me correctly, states that the UK Government are committed to providing appropriate public services through the medium of Welsh. On 15 January last year, a report by the Committee appeared that looked specifically at the charter's implementation in Britain, and although there are some positive comments, generally speaking the provision of public services through the medium of Welsh is still weak across the UK, and I think this is relevant to prison services as well as other public services. We have also seen evidence that the picture is very patchy. So that is the first thing: the report on the European charter on minority languages.

Article 6.3 of section I of the European convention on human rights states that when an individual is sentenced or when evidence of transgression of the law is presented, the information should be provided in the language that he or she understands. It does not mention which language that should be, but I think there is a fundamental principle there in terms of effective communication within the prison service, which is of use to you as a Committee as you consider your evidence. We are not talking about a specific language, but a fundamental right to receive information in a language that the individual understands. That could be, and more and more would be, the Welsh language.

Q179 Chair: I was in a young offenders institute recently—Pucklechurch in England, but it was housing people from Wales as well. I had a feeling, perhaps unfairly, that the vast majority there were not speaking English all that well, even though they were mostly native English speakers. Do you feel there is a demand in Welsh that is not being met, or whether we should actually be looking at the basic language and literacy skills of those who go into the system? I do not want to be unkind about it, but I feel a lot of them really lack just basic skills, full stop, and Welsh would be a huge luxury but maybe not one that many of them are ready for yet.

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* Naturally, as the Welsh Language Commissioner, it is the Welsh language that is the subject of interest to me. On the question of effective communication, you mentioned the word “luxury”. I would make two points: the fundamental right to be allowed to communicate in your own language—the Welsh language now has official status—and to effective communication in the first language or mother tongue because they cannot communicate effectively in their second language. I would argue strongly that such an offer in terms of the prison service and natural justice is not a luxury, but a fundamental and basic need.

Q180 Chair: *(Translation)* What is your assessment of the status of the Welsh language in prisons? I do not want to pick just on you, Meri.

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* No, you can pick on Huw as well, but I will begin. Our contact with the prison service is twofold. First, we have links with NOMS, which has a language scheme that was approved in 2013. We have a relationship as regards the way in which they are trying to deliver services, therefore we get a possible source of information from NOMS. We also get some information from individuals who bring concerns to our attention and some of those concerns turn into formal complaints. We have dealt with five formal complaints against the prison service since the establishment of the Welsh Language Commissioner post.

What we are seeing at present on the basis of both complaints and evidence, and of course research carried out by others, is that the service is very, very patchy. There are examples of good practice that you have heard about, both in and outside of Wales, where an effort is made to meet demands, but it is not very effective and it is not consistent—it is very patchy across England and Wales. However, I must emphasise that the data and evidence being collected are weak. The Chief Inspector of Prisons drew that to your attention earlier, but it is a cause of concern, certainly for me, that the data that form the basis of the service planning are particularly thinly spread. If anything needs to be done, it is that the quality of that data needs to be improved.

Q181 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* Hello and welcome. May I ask you about Wrexham? The new prison in Wrexham will provide an opportunity to create systems that better respond to the needs of Welsh-language prisoners. What would you like to see happen to create effective provision in Wrexham?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* Thank you for that question. I agree that there is an opportunity here to look anew, with fresh eyes, at what is being provided in Wales. If I may return to my answer to the previous question, the first entirely essential thing is current, reliable data in terms of the nature of the community and the community within the prison. How many people—men, women and young people—speak Welsh should be the basis for planning.

In looking at the experience in the new prison at Wrexham, what I as Commissioner would hope to see is an entirely bilingual service that provides for the needs of individuals who want to communicate through the medium of Welsh, be that with staff and with third-sector organisations who come into the prison—there will be great emphasis on moving people on when they leave prison, so the link with the third sector is so important. The link with the education system should appropriately be available through the medium of Welsh, where that is the language of choice.

I would also hope that the experience of families will be considered. We have heard evidence of families feeling excluded when dealing with prisons, so there should be appropriate provision in terms of the Welsh language and there should not be any problems arising. I would also hope that an assessment would be made—Huw might

like to add to this—of developing Wrexham prison and looking at the impact of that on the community of north-east Wales. That would be an important piece of work. Prisons exist not in a vacuum, but in a certain area and a certain community. Therefore, we should not look simply at what is happening in the prison and plan that for that purpose, but we should look at its impact on north Wales as a whole and north-east Wales specifically.

Huw Gapper: *(Translation)* I think we must consider the proposed size of the prison. We have not been collecting evidence on this ourselves, but evidence has been stated—based on research into large prisons in other areas, I believe—that the majority of the prison staff may not be local people. If so, there is a potential for such a large number of new people to move into the area that it will have a huge impact on the community—for example, the number of school places needed. We will need quite a detailed impact assessment not only of the possible negative effects, but of the potential for the prison to contribute to the Government’s vision of promoting the Welsh language. For example, if people do move to the area to work—which may be inevitable—there will be opportunities to promote the teaching and learning of Welsh in prisons, and there might be other positive side effects for the Welsh language.

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* Huw’s point leads us on to another aspect of our vision of what could happen: the creation of a bilingual work force that can appropriately serve within a prison, be that by providing language skills to the people moving in, or looking at the work force for the future that could provide this Welsh-medium and bilingual service within the prison.

We talk a great deal about the Welsh language, but we also need to look at the shape of the prison inside and how that can be designed. You have taken evidence about the idea of creating a campus, and looking at the needs of young people and women when planning the new prison in Wrexham. This is a wonderful opportunity to take a step back and look at the needs of prisoners from Wales—that is my interest—and the nature of the prison, and to think afresh.

Q182 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* Your evidence is very interesting. Have you had an opportunity to play a role in planning the new prison in Wrexham?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* There is a healthy relationship between the commissioner and NOMS in Wales. We appreciate the fact that NOMS has one chief officer in Wales looking at the prison service and the probation service, and negotiations and discussions are ongoing. However, we still need further evidence. One of the strong messages from the commissioner’s office is that we need more evidence and a greater understanding of the current patterns and how we can create a prison that will meet those needs. We are at the beginning of the journey. That relationship needs to be strengthened, and NOMS needs to gather that evidence.

Q183 Nia Griffith: *(Translation)* Is NOMS open to your comments, and does it listen to your good ideas?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* We certainly have regular meetings with NOMS. The extent to which it takes that information on board is a question for NOMS.

Huw Gapper: *(Translation)* Yes, a dialogue is taking place as regards planning Welsh language services within the prisons, and, as has been mentioned, we need to look in a broader manner at the prison's effect on the Welsh language in Wrexham and the neighbouring areas. We have asked the question who is going to undertake that assessment, and we have not received a response. Other major infrastructure projects are taking place in north Wales at present, and work is being undertaken to assess the impact of those developments on the Welsh language; and so it is something that needs to be done and that could be done, but we have not yet been required or invited to be part of any such assessment.

Q184 Mrs James: *(Translation)* You have mentioned that some Welsh-speaking prisoners are dependent on friends and family for Welsh-language books, rather than on prison libraries. What is the evidence for this?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* Some months ago, if not slightly over a year ago, a statement was made about prisoners' privileges and that there was an effort to reduce the number of privileges—that people could not receive books in the same manner as previously. It is interesting that, when that happened, we heard, again, second hand, and came to understand how dependent prisoners were on friends and family for receiving books and resources through the medium of Welsh. In many prisons—and we must bear in mind that Welsh prisoners are in about 108 prisons across Wales and England—the provision was weak and thinly spread. So certainly outside Wales it is very patchy, and it is not planned from the centre; and in a period when people are much more dependent on information technology, this is another example of lack of strategic planning from the centre.

Q185 Mrs James: *(Translation)* In your view, what is the minimum level of educational provision for Welsh speakers—first or second-language Welsh speakers? What is the very minimum that they should offer prisoners?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* I am going to challenge the concept of a minimum standard—

Mrs James: *(Translation)* Minimum levels, not standards.

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* I think if you look at individual rights, they should fundamentally be the same wherever they are in the prison system. I understand that there are practical challenges in that regard, but an effort should be made, as is reflected in the NOMS language scheme, to ensure appropriate provision and an assessment of that provision wherever that prisoner is, in Wales or in England—wherever they are placed. That is the basis for planning: to assume that an individual has a right to an assessment of basic needs, a right to bilingual provision, wherever the prisoner is, and

to plan for that. That may mean that decisions have to be made on prisoner location in order to secure those fundamental rights.

Q186 Mrs James: *(Translation)* What about people who make their homes in Wales, or need to learn Welsh or improve their Welsh skills—not Welsh speakers but those who want to learn the language? What sort of standards should be in place for those people, and what should prisons offer, wherever they are in the prison estate?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* I will turn to Huw on this one.

Huw Gapper: *(Translation)* I think that is an extremely interesting point. Other organisations that have provided evidence to you referred to the significant potential that Welsh language skills have for those people who need to be re-established in communities in Wales, particularly in Welsh-speaking or bilingual communities. So that is a very interesting question indeed.

Estyn has published reports in the context of the education available specifically to young people in prisons in Wales, and they demonstrate that the Welsh language training provision is inconsistent and isn't proactively offered to young people. The potential is there, according to the evidence provided by a number of organisations, but the reports suggest that perhaps we aren't taking full advantage of that potential at present.

Q187 Glyn Davies: *(Translation)* I have one brief question, which will more than likely conclude the session. What will be the impact of devolving the prison and probation systems to Wales? What will be the challenges and opportunities for the Welsh language if that were to occur some time in the future?

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* I'm not going to express a view on devolving the services, but I would argue strongly that the needs are the same whether or not they are devolved. There should be an understanding, based on firm and contemporary evidence, of the needs of Wales in the prison service, and purposeful planning. We should then measure the impact of that provision, because there is a lot of talk in the prison and justice services about moving people on—relocating and resettling people—and it is about more than just providing a prison; it is about providing a public service. Whether or not it is devolved, the needs of Welsh speakers within the service have to be at the heart of planning in Wales or in Wales and England. The needs are the same wherever the service is.

Q188 Chair: *(Translation)* That is fair enough. Thank you very much for joining us today and for providing evidence.

Meri Huws: *(Translation)* Thank you for the invitation. This is an exceptionally important piece of work. It is very timely, when there is so much discussion about the development of Wrexham prison and the needs and aims of the justice system.

Chair: *(Translation)* I hope that the Government will agree and look very carefully at our report when it is published. Thank you very much.