



A short case study on the development and support of the Welsh language through Wales Wide Training Programme (WWTP) May 2024-May 2025

"When the body moves, the mind remembers - through dance, we don't just speak a language, we embody it."

Wales Wide Training Programme is managed by Rubicon Dance and through the programme it coordinates and connects 28 organisations and 330 individuals to ensure consistent training, support, connection and professional development in the community dance sector across Wales. The programme is supported by Arts Council of Wales with match funding through The Waterloo Foundation.

Wales Wide Training Programme brings to the dance sector in Wales an energetic, generous, relevant, valuable effervescence of discussion, professional development, collaboration and friendships that invest in the people that lead and make dance happen in Wales.

With Welsh Government's aim to achieve 1 million Welsh Speakers by 2050, what role can dance play in supporting this? Dance is understood by many to be a universal language, so what difference does it make whether dance is delivered in Welsh or English? Wales Wide Training Programme has seen a growing interest in dance practitioners and artists wanting to develop bilingual dance practice, and this is to be celebrated, but what is it like to be a dance professional who places Cymraeg at the heart of practice?

For this case study we will focus on the "Sensing Welsh" sessions facilitated by Jen Angharad, CEO, YMa, Pontypridd but in terms of Welsh language development and support for dance practitioners we have also focused on -

- Creative Practice Support Sessions for dance practitioners, facilitated in Welsh, English or Bilingually by Cai Tomos, Freelance Dance Artist, Movement Psychotherapist, Mid Wales (please note that there is a separate case study written on the support sessions available in Welsh and English – for a copy please email tracey@rubicondance.co.uk)
- Traditional Welsh Dance, facilitated by Rhian Davies, Menter Maldwyn, north Wales
- Welsh Language Forum - "What is it like to be a first language Welsh dance practitioner in Wales?" Discussions facilitated by Jen Angharad, CEO, YMa, Pontypridd

Synhwyro'r Gymraeg, Sensing Welsh:

When dance practitioners and artists wanted to develop their confidence, skills and knowledge in using Cymraeg, the Welsh language, in their practice, the Wales Wide Training Programme built a bespoke professional development project: *Synhwyrô'r Gymraeg / Sensing Welsh – Developing Bilingual Practice Through the Body*.

The programme was developed by Wales Wide Training Programme, which is managed by Rubicon Dance. It was delivered by Jên Angharad, through a series of virtual, online sessions for small groups of dance practitioners. The participants were a mix of fairly experienced Welsh learners as well as complete beginners. As a follow on from the group sessions, individual 1:1 sessions were offered with Jên that responded to individual needs and issues.

Synhwyrô'r Gymraeg aimed to:

- Explore how movement, dance, sound and the sound of words and language can be used to develop physical and actual vocabulary and create or strengthen the connection with the Welsh language
- Introduce and develop vocabulary and expressions using movement and the body to support the learning of vocabulary and terminology
- Develop skills and confidence in using Welsh in community dance sessions
- Offer direct support to dancers and dance practitioners in developing bilingual practice

Clear aims were set out in each session:

- e.g., Session 1: Vocabulary; Session 2: Structuring Sentences
- Physical work exploring sounds and learning vocabulary and context; opportunities to ask questions and discuss
- Resources: Lists of vocabulary and context, e.g., sounds of the alphabet with phonetic guidance to aid pronunciation; names of body parts
- Contextual expressions, e.g., “Find a free space”, “with your partner”, “freeze the shape” along with specific dance terms, e.g., Port de bras – symud y breichiau, Plié – plygu'r pengliniau
- Key words related to the New Curriculum, e.g., Creativity and imagination, Complexity, Control, Depth, Independence

A great strength of the programme was its ability and agility to be responsive to needs. A WhatsApp discussion group was set up as a quick helpline for the more experienced learners seeking support and assistance with terminology, translation, and pronunciation (through voice notes).

Jên Angharad's instinct was to ask at the beginning of the 1:1 sessions “*What do you need?*”, which enabled her to offer practical advice and develop a welcoming, inclusive environment and being able to build on the dance practitioner's confidence in not only using the language or some of the language, but embracing the relationship with Cymraeg within sessions or work or performances.”

Impact:

Investing time and resources to explore, drive and deliver a unique, bespoke development tool for dance practitioners to embrace and use the Welsh language within their work and sessions has had great positive impact on individuals. The group sessions brought together non-Welsh speakers and Welsh learners of differing levels, expertly supported by an experienced and sensitive facilitator who has a grasp of the complexity of language and people's relationships with languages. Introducing

language through movement springboarded positive relationships with the Welsh language and has contributed towards breaking down the barriers that may overwhelm and even stop a practitioner from trying to use whatever level of Cymraeg they possess. Being agile and responsive to need ensured that the project grew and developed with the participants, ensuring the best experience.

By driving and delivering Synhwyro'r Iaith, WWTP has invested in the dance sector in Wales by:

- Empowering dance practitioners and artists to share creative opportunities that contribute to growth in the use and ownership of the Welsh language.
- Making the Welsh language accessible and usable.
- Developing a practical range of skills: useful vocabulary and phrases for instant delivery in bilingual communities.
- Inspiring dance artists and practitioners to consider and explore relationships with language, cultural identity, bilingualism and multi-lingualism and a sense of place, within their practice.

As there is no specific higher education qualification in Contemporary dance available through the medium of Welsh, a gap sometimes exists in the relationship between Contemporary dance and the Welsh language and culture. There are well-qualified and highly experienced dance artists and practitioners who are bilingual or multilingual, and they have forged their own paths without sector specific guidance on how to develop and deliver dance and community dance through the Welsh language and/or bilingually."

However, several developments seem to have synergy and have made significant contributions— and will continue to play a vital role—in supporting the dance sector in Wales to bring together dance and the Welsh language:

- The Arts Council of Wales Strategy, which includes the Welsh language as one of its six strategic principles;
- The establishment of the Welsh Language Enabler role and the creation of the Welsh Arts Consortium;
- Initiatives such as the Llais y Lle lottery programme, the Wales Wide Training Programme, including Synhwyro'r Gymraeg.

Feedback from Synhwyro'r Gymraeg's Facilitator:

"It's fabulous to be supporting dance practitioners, facilitators, artists to grow in confidence to speak Cymraeg in practice through WWTP short one to one on-line sessions. To share a language of dance in our communities across Cymru, it's so important that Cymraeg is placed at the heart of dance in Cymru"

Feedback from dance practitioners:

"Another incredible one to one Welsh session with Jen"

"This is the best way for me to learn, one to one, explanation and connecting language to movement"

"It was like an explosion of useful – phenomenal!"

"The one to one was gold dust"

"It's very much like having a coaching session. She waits to hear what you're bringing. Listens to your struggle. Waits. Let's you find your question when you don't know where you are, and then we'll will come back in. Very skilful facilitation, and very open"

*"Jên came and very quickly and very succinctly took meaning. This is what a word means and got a bunch of dancers moving through the signs and the rhythm and that pulse of lifeblood coming into the dance community, you know there's an undertow there. There's nothing you **have** to learn. There's nothing you **have** to do different. It's that undertow of propulsion, and the Welsh language being a drive for movement rather than just 'I want to lead more in Welsh'.*

Other Feedback:

Rhian Davies who recently presented for WWTP is a traditional Welsh dancer based in north Wales. She specialises in Twmpath (Welsh ceilidh) social dancing, Welsh set folk dancing and Welsh clog dancing. Rhian has over 20 years of community development experience through her work with the Mentrau Iaith (Welsh Language Initiatives), and is an experienced project leader, festival organiser and Welsh folk advocate.

Rhian Davies, Menter Malwyn, north Wales:

"Being able to give a presentation and lead a discussion about Traditional Welsh Dancing as part of the Wales Wide Training Programme organised by Rubicon Dance was wonderful. Traditional dancing has not always featured on the professional dance sector's radar in Wales – so it was great to get a voice on this platform. Through Project Wyth we aim to promote, develop and move traditional dancing forward in Wales, and hosting this session was a step in the right direction to spread our message, share good practice, make connections and develop exciting ideas for collaboration".

Einir Siôn, Welsh Language Enabler, Arts Council of Wales

"Llongyfarchiadau on doing so much in this area. I love the way you've integrated the Welsh Language into every aspect of the work and offer to the sector. I'm grateful to you for being so thorough and thoughtful in your planning and implementation"

Dwynwen Lloyd Llywelyn, Head of Theatre, Theatr Felinfach, Ceredigion (and a partner in Wales Wide Training Programme since 2015)

