

Official Languages Scheme: Annual Report 2022-23

June 2023



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the Senedd Commission's annual report on its Official Languages Scheme. This is the first such report since the Scheme for the Sixth Senedd was approved in September 2022. As well as responding to the recommendations of an internal audit on the work of the Official Languages Team, we have also worked on implementing the new Scheme and ensuring that our existing record of high standards is maintained.

This year marked 10 years since the first Official Languages Scheme was approved and adopted in July 2012. The organisation has inevitably evolved since those early days, but the Commission's commitment to providing world-class bilingual services remains unchanged. As well as supporting and advising Members, support staff and Commission staff to work bilingually from day to day, the team has taken a broader look at good practice. We have sought opportunities to learn from others, so that we can be at the forefront of advances in language technology and bilingual working. The team has also actively sought opportunities to support and advise others, both in Wales and further afield. We are very proud of our achievements and of our reputation as a truly bilingual organisation; it is important that we share these wherever possible, whilst at the same time continuing to seek opportunities to improve.

Over the year ahead, we plan to look at the support available to Members of the Senedd to enable them to contribute in their preferred language, and to feel confident when doing so, whether in proceedings or in their constituency. We will also consider our language planning processes, by reviewing the language plans prepared by individual service areas and gathering information on the language skills of Commission staff. All of this will provide assurance as to the level of language skills across the Senedd and capacity to deliver world-class services.



Rhun ap Iorwerth MS

Commissioner with responsibility for official languages

Our performance

Our commitment and values.

The Senedd is an organisation that acts according to its values, and those values reflect a commitment to diversity across the organisation. We appreciate and encourage diversity within our workforce. We appreciate every member of staff – whatever their level of bilingual skills – for their commitment to the Senedd and for their professional and parliamentary expertise. The principles enshrined in the dignity and respect policy are at the heart of everything we do. We expect every member of staff to be committed to providing support and parliamentary services of the highest standard to Members of the Senedd and their support staff, and to the public, in both official languages.

It is almost a year since the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd was approved by Members in Plenary in September 2022. Since then, the Official Languages Team has focused on delivering and implementing the Scheme. Our aim is to maintain the high standards and expectations established during the Fifth Senedd, and to ensure that we do not rest on our laurels. We are held to account by Members of the Sixth Senedd on behalf of the people of Wales.

An internal audit was carried out during 2021-22, focusing on the Official Languages Team's effectiveness in monitoring and implementing the Official Languages Scheme. The audit's content and recommendations, as well as the actions identified by the Official Languages Team, were considered by the Commission's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in November 2022.

Based on the audit's recommendations, a task and finish group was established to discuss ways of monitoring and reporting complaints and non-compliance incidents. The group included representatives from the Official Languages Team, the Official Languages Scheme Co-ordinators' Forum and the Governance Team. Following initial discussions, the group recommended that the support available to Co-ordinators should be strengthened. In order to achieve this, a description of the role was drawn up for prospective Co-ordinators, as well as guidance on how to handle complaints or failure to comply with the Scheme. This will strengthen the existing processes for such cases to ensure that we record all incidents and share any lessons learned. The Official Languages Team will also liaise with colleagues in other organisations to discuss good practice when handling complaints and reporting on performance. Over the next year, the Team will also consider ways of recording the details of complaints and non-compliance incidents to ensure that the process is as simple as possible.

Recommendations were also made regarding awareness of the Scheme. The recommendations were especially timely, as we were preparing to adopt a new Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd. The Scheme is now more prominently displayed on the Senedd Commission staff intranet, with a new heading under the Culture, Values & Networks section. Currently, Commission staff are able to access information about the Scheme and compliance issues, as well as information about learning Welsh and improving their skills (gloywi iaith). Over the coming year, the Team will develop further elements, including advice on bilingual working. Any information that is developed will also be published in the Bilingual Working section of the Members' intranet.

Service Standards

The format of the Scheme for the Sixth Senedd was changed to make it easier to comply with the Scheme's requirements without having to interpret the wording of the service standards. There was also an opportunity, when reviewing the Scheme for the Fifth Senedd before adopting the Scheme for the Sixth Senedd, to consider the effectiveness of the Bilingual Skills Strategy. It was decided that the Scheme and Strategy should be combined to create a comprehensive document for anyone wishing to obtain information about our official languages.

Senedd business

With the lifting of all restrictions imposed during the Coronavirus pandemic, Senedd Cymru has moved to a new way of working, incorporating hybrid working into all elements of its work. This includes ensuring that Senedd meetings and events are held in a way that allows participants to use their official language of choice by default, whether taking part in person or online. To this end, Senedd Commission staff have been collaborating with *Microsoft's* stakeholder group to test new technology that will facilitate any kind of bilingual working. During a launch event at the National Eisteddfod in August 2022, the Welsh Government announced that a simultaneous interpretation feature is now available within *Microsoft Teams*. The Senedd Commission was part of the team that worked with the Welsh Government and *Microsoft* to test the feature. The simultaneous interpretation feature is now one of the options available to us when arranging formal and informal meetings and events.

Feedback from Members of the Senedd and their support staff

Feedback is important to ensure that we tailor our services to meet the needs of all Members of the Senedd. During autumn 2022, feedback was gathered from most Members about their ways of working and their experience of Commission services in general. The feedback was positive in terms of being able to work in their language of choice and the support available to do so. The Official

Languages Team is always eager to receive feedback from Members and their staff and to adapting any services to meet their needs.

Sharing Expertise

As is our custom, we have taken the opportunity once again this year to reach out to organisations across Wales and beyond to offer help and support. We are always happy to discuss our experiences and share lessons learnt over the decade since the Official Languages Act 2012 came into force. One of our objectives is to try to do more of this work, using our existing international networks.

In July 2022, the British Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association Symposium was held on the Senedd estate. The theme chosen for the Symposium was languages, and some of the varied sessions covered the recording of official languages and dialects. There was also an opportunity for delegates to take part in a courtesy-level Welsh session so they could learn a little more about our language skills matrix and also pick up a few phrases. More recently, the Official Languages Team welcomed visitors from the *Rannóg an Aistriúcháin*, the *Oireachtas* Translation Service, which is responsible for bilingual services at the Parliament. The visit provided an opportunity to learn more about the work of the Translation and Reporting Service and the bilingual services provided across the organisation. We hope to continue the relationship as the *Oireachtas* further develops its bilingual services. We also took part in a session for colleagues from the House of Commons Library, on a visit organised by the Research Service. This included a presentation on the Official Languages Scheme as well as a courtesy-level Welsh session.

Statistical Information

In accordance with Service Standard 11.3 of the Official Languages Scheme, the Senedd Commission is required to include statistical information in its annual report on the Official Languages Scheme.

We use this information to ensure that we continue to provide world-class bilingual services, and that we're implementing the Scheme consistently and in accordance with all service standards and our stakeholders' expectations. The previous year's statistical information is also provided for reference.

Recruitment

The language skills required for each position are set out in each individual service's language schemes, and are decided in discussions between Official Languages Co-ordinators, Heads of Service and the Official Languages Team. Teams confirm the language skills required for each vacancy or new position as part of the process of seeking the Executive Board's permission to advertise posts.

Number of posts advertised at courtesy-level Welsh, or with a higher language skills requirement.

External

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2021-22	47	32	0	15
2022-23	51	34	0	17

Internal

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2021-22	20	9	0	11
2022-23	19	13	0	6

Total

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2021-22	67	41	0	26
2022-23	70	47	0	23

Percentages

	Courtesy level posts	Level 1 - 5 posts
2021-22	61%	39%
2022-23	67%	33%

Senedd Business

Percentage of documents published by Senedd Committees in Welsh and English, and bilingually.

	Bilingual	Welsh only	English only
2022-23	1651	0	17

Ensuring that Members of the Senedd are able to prepare for committee meetings in the language of their choice is essential. Committee papers prepared by the Senedd Commission are prepared bilingually, and committee teams emphasise the need for evidence and papers from third parties also to be bilingually. The unique arrangements for briefing the members of each committee, including when and in what form the briefing papers are required, have continued.

Papers prepared in English only include direct responses to correspondence received in English only in accordance with standard 2.2 of the Official Languages Scheme.

Laid Documents

Year	Number of documents laid	Number of documents not laid bilingually	Percentage
2021-22	930	69	7%
2022-23	885	47	5%

Documents by the Senedd Commission are drafted and laid in both languages. In accordance with Standing Order 15.4, any document laid or business tabled by the Llywydd, the Commission, the Welsh Government, any committee or the Clerk, must be laid or tabled in both English and Welsh, so far as is appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable. The documents that were not laid bilingually this year come under four categories:

- Reports by external bodies that the Welsh Government is required to lay before the Senedd;
- Explanatory Memoranda;
- Subordinate legislation;
- Statutory Instrument Consent Memoranda.

Proceedings

Percentage of Welsh language contributions in Plenary proceedings and Committee meetings

Type of contribution	Percentage of Welsh language contributions 2021-22	Percentage of Welsh language contributions 2022-23
Plenary proceedings	30%	30%
Committee proceedings	12%	8%

The percentage of Welsh-language contributions in Plenary sessions this year has remained the same, and over the next year we will continue to provide services to Members to at least maintain that level. However, there was a fall in the percentage of Welsh-language contributions in Committees. Members are able to get support, including briefing documents, in their official language of choice when preparing for committee proceedings. A number of external issues affect the percentage of contributions, including the language choice of witnesses giving evidence to committees, and the less structured nature of discussions in committee meetings.

Nevertheless, this fall in contributions is disappointing and concerning, and we need to take steps to ensure that all committee participants, be they Members or other participants, are aware of their right to use their preferred language in proceedings. We will look specifically at how to facilitate the use of Welsh in committee meetings, including levels of awareness and encouragement amongst Chairs and committee teams. We will ensure that we make the best use of existing technology as well as being at the cutting edge of emerging and evolving technology, making a commitment to use those technologies innovatively and responsibly.

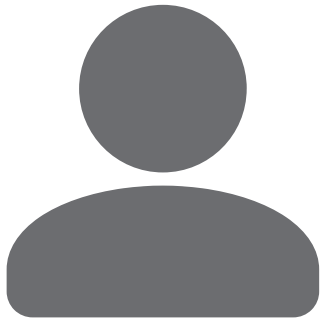
Themes

Language Skills

It is vital that we ensure that Senedd Commission staff are equipped with the relevant skills to deliver world-class bilingual services. Over the past year, the team has continued to offer a wide range of courses and training to support Commission staff to develop their skills, ranging from one-to-one sessions, group classes or individual sessions on specific topics, and provision to support those preparing to sit exams. During the year, the team has also provided flexible and bespoke Welsh lessons and language refresher sessions to Members and their support staff. The team has adapted to the new way of working within the Senedd, providing a balance of face-to-face and hybrid lessons and sessions, in line with learners' wishes, to fit around work patterns.

In line with the intention stated in last year's annual report, the Official Languages Team has set about attracting new learners and former learners who were unable to carry on learning due to the pandemic. An increasing number of Members and staff are receiving training from the team, and the numbers are now back to pre-pandemic levels. This increase is a result of the flexibility on offer, not only in terms of lesson times and learning methods, but the ability to learn online or in person, or through a mixture of both. The team has also developed a new system of offering new learners intensive one-to-one lessons and allowing them to join existing classes, where possible, rather than creating a waiting list and setting up new classes. The system maximises the tutoring team's capacity and means that potential learners do not have to wait long before starting lessons.

WELSH LEARNERS



15

Members



34

Support staff



95

Commission staff

82%

Increase in Welsh learners
between March 2022 and
March 2023



10

Number of our Welsh
learners who sat external
WJEC exams this year

Recruitment

During the Fifth Senedd, the language skills matrix approach to determining Welsh language skills became well established. After five years in operation, now is a good time to review, modify and develop the system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Suggestions to this effect were also made in the internal audit. Over the past year, it has been agreed that it would be more suitable to carry out Courtesy-level Welsh assessments during the probation period of staff members appointed to positions at that level. The team have now amended and updated the Courtesy-level Welsh module and are in the process of updating the assessment, again to ensure that it is fit for purpose and appropriate for online or in-person delivery. The team will conduct extensive tests before making any changes. The team will also continue to consider the wording of the language skills matrix to ensure it is suitable and easy to use.

One recommendation made in the internal audit of the Official Languages Team's work was to contact recruiting managers a year after new staff had started to establish whether the Welsh language skills required on appointment remained appropriate to the role in question. This will be an opportunity to understand whether the appointments have enabled teams to deliver world-class bilingual services, and whether the descriptions in the matrix are clear and appropriate. It will also be an opportunity to check whether any training needs have arisen in terms of an individual's language skills. The Official Languages Team is looking at suitable methods of gathering this information and recording any lessons learnt.

The organisation's bilingual ethos

Bilingualism is the norm within the Senedd, and it is very important that we maintain our reputation in this respect. We continue to seek ways to ensure that we maintain the highest standards and meet the needs and expectations of Members of the Senedd, their support staff and the people of Wales. Therefore, it is vital that we ensure that Senedd Commission staff are aware of the requirements of the Official Languages Scheme and of our organisation's bilingual culture. A further recommendation was made in the internal audit regarding the accessibility of the Official Languages Scheme and information about bilingual working on the Senedd intranet. It was, therefore, decided that there should be a dedicated area on the intranet where one can directly access the Scheme, along with information about learning Welsh and improving Welsh language skills. Over the coming year, the team will add more information to this facility.

The language awareness video for Senedd Commission staff was reviewed to update information about the Scheme itself and any other details, such as the 2021 Census results. The video will be seen by new Commission staff during their induction training. It is also an important resource for maintaining awareness among staff who have been at the Senedd for some time. Virtual and in-person events have been held over the past year to mark specific occasions. The St David's Day event was a particularly good opportunity to meet Members, support

staff and Commission staff to answer questions about the new Scheme, to offer advice on bilingual working or to encourage them to sign up for Welsh lessons or language refresher courses. Positive feedback was received following the event, including the fact that it was a good opportunity to get to know the team better.

The Official Languages Team is always available to offer advice to Members and their support staff on bilingual working, and the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd sets out a number of ways we can offer support. The Members' intranet includes a subsection on bilingual working. The Scheme for the Sixth Senedd can be accessed from here, along with previous Schemes and details of what Members of the Senedd are required to do. The subsection also contains advice in the form of 'FAQs', information about using Welsh on your computer and details of the services available from our language tutors. The Official Languages Scheme also saw the relaunch of the language 'Buddy' scheme. 'Buddies' act as a point of contact to offer advice and support on any issues to do with bilingual working. Over the coming year, the team will ensure that every Member's office receives information about the 'Buddy' scheme and the relevant contact details. We will also be holding more events like the one held on St David's Day and exploring other opportunities to engage with Members and their support staff.

In the coming year, we will continue to work on the above themes to achieve all of the stated objectives, and we will also make a start on the themes listed under **Procurement, Use of Welsh language skills and Learning and improvement.**

Monitoring and Compliance

The introduction of the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd provided an opportunity to review monitoring mechanisms across the organisation. Heads of Service are now required to provide assurances regarding compliance with the Scheme's requirements as part of their annual Assurance Statement. Heads of Service are supported by the Official Languages Co-ordinators.

As part of the work to review the Official Languages Scheme of the Fifth Senedd and draft the Scheme for the Sixth Senedd, Heads of Service and Co-ordinators gave feedback on the process for monitoring and recording complaints and instances of non-compliance incidents. It was decided that the Co-ordinators' role description should be reviewed and clear guidance drafted on handling complaints, identifying non-compliance incidents and recording lessons learnt. The documents will be shared with Co-ordinators and Heads of Service before adopting these changes. The Official Languages Team will also look at best practice at other public organisations in Wales to ensure that our compliance monitoring is as effective as possible.

There was a chance that the introduction of a new Official Languages Scheme, and the resulting changes and improvements, might lead to a few mistakes or misunderstandings regarding the requirements of the Scheme. However, there have been no formal complaints this year about our provision. The Official Languages Scheme Co-ordinators Forum has met to discuss issues relating to the Scheme, and other internal processes for monitoring compliance also take place on a regular basis. These processes have shown that we have at times failed to meet the high standards set out in the Scheme, or have been at risk of failing to meet the expectations of our service users. Those instances relate to two areas:

Errors on the website or online

Sometimes linguistic errors appear on our website in both of our official languages. We are always grateful to be made aware of such errors so that they can be corrected immediately. When an error occurs, we will revisit the checking

and proofreading processes for publicly available text. Those processes will be reinforced as necessary. We will also remind colleagues about the Translation and Recording Service's text checking facility, which can offer reassurance to staff wishing to work bilingually. Anyone who lacks confidence in their language skills can also get support from the Official Languages Team.

Lack of bilingual training materials

We received feedback that materials provided at an in-house training session were not available in Welsh. The issue was discussed with the Learning and Development Team, who were offered an awareness-raising session to ensure that everyone is aware of the expectations for our in-house provision and of the services available to help with the development of bilingual materials.

