Update for Staff on Changes to Recruitment to Implement Theme One of the Official Languages Scheme

Background

The Official Languages Scheme for the Fifth Assembly was formally adopted by the Assembly on 12 July 2017.

As well as outlining the service standards that we already deliver, the Scheme has five themes: recruitment; language skills; language planning; Assembly proceedings; and developing the bilingual ethos of the organisation.

As part of theme one, the Scheme sets out steps we will take to amend our method of recruitment and selection in order to increase the level of basic Welsh skills across the organisation.

This update outlines the work carried out so far and gives advance notice to staff of planned changes in relation to recruitment that will come into play on 16 July 2018.

What are the changes in relation to recruitment?

* All new posts, and posts that become vacant on a temporary or permanent basis will be advertised with courtesy level Welsh as a minimum skills level unless a higher level of skills (levels 1 – 5) is identified. Candidates will be assessed as part of the interview process, and those who do not achieve the required standard will need to commit to gaining the skills as part of the probation period. This is effective from 16 July 2018;
* Language skills levels descriptors to replace Welsh Essential and Welsh Desirable;
* Recruiting managers to use newly developed guidance and templates, along with their service area Language Plans, to ascertain the level of skills required for posts.

Who does this apply to?

This applies to staff employed by the Assembly Commission including those who take up temporary appointments such as apprenticeships, internships or secondments with us. It does not apply to Assembly Members and their staff, or to our contractors or appointments such as committee expert advisors or independent advisors.

Courtesy Level Welsh

What is courtesy level Welsh?

The OLS Working Group, as part of its work, developed a **definition of courtesy level Welsh**:

* To pronounce Welsh names, answer the telephone, greet people or make introductions bilingually;
* To understand and use proactively familiar, everyday, expressions; and
* To understand very short texts where people are giving basic information about themselves or others in correspondence, on forms or to interpret content using the technology available.

What is the rationale for introducing courtesy level Welsh?

The Assembly is a bilingual organisation. We value all our staff members, regardless of their degree of bilingualism, for both the commitment they bring to the Assembly and their professional and parliamentary expertise. Our ambition is to be a truly bilingual organisation where Assembly Members, the public and staff can choose to work or communicate naturally in either or both of our official languages. Therefore, in order to increase the level of basic level Welsh-language skills across the organisation over time, and to build on our existing bilingual ethos we have changed the way we describe language skills in job specs and introduced a minimum Welsh language skills level (courtesy level Welsh) for all posts advertised after summer 2018.

How will you ascertain if someone has courtesy level Welsh?

A standard assessment has been developed and piloted based on the definition above. The Language Skills Team and a group of individuals who have been trained to undertake the assessment offer regular opportunities to staff members to be assessed. Once a person has achieved the required skills level, they will receive a certificate which will be valid for a period of two years.

I’m a Welsh speaker, do I need to take the courtesy level assessment?

Only if you apply for a post requiring Courtesy level Welsh skills. Every candidate will be assessed as part of the interview stage.

What does the assessment involve?

There are two parts to the assessment:

Part 1: Pronunciation.

This part relates to oral communication. The emphasis is on pronouncing words and names correctly and using and responding to common phrases (e.g. bore da, prynhawn da; pwy wyt ti?; XX ydw i; sut wyt ti? da iawn diolch; wedi blino etc)

Part 2: Courtesy

This part relates to written communication. The emphasis will be on using information and guidance that is available bilingually to understand or draft Welsh text (e.g. out of office messages or interpreting expenses forms), and also how to deal with written text that you are unable to understand in a courteous and effective manner using the services and technology available to Commission staff.

How will you support me if I am unable to complete the assessment to the required standard?

If you do not achieve the required standard during the assessment, we will arrange for you to receive training and support to gain the required levels within a timescale agreed with your line manager.

Language Skills Levels

In addition to courtesy level Welsh, we will also be introducing a language skills matrix that defines Welsh language skills levels (1-5) in four areas: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The levels will be used to replace the previous Welsh Essential and Welsh Desirable descriptors. The aim is to make it easier for applicants to understand exactly what we expect of them in terms of their Welsh language skills.

What is the language skills matrix?

The language skills matrix is a grid containing descriptions of Welsh language skills levels graded from 1 to 5 in four areas, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The descriptions will from part of the job description for any post requiring skills levels higher than courtesy level Welsh.

Why do we need it?

The matrix will ensure that we help applicants understand what is required of them and how we will expect them to use their Welsh language skills in their job. It will also ensure that we are consistent in the way we describe Welsh language skills requirements for jobs.

How has the language skills matrix been designed?

The matrix is based on a widely used model created by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). Most of the organisations in Wales that use a language skills matrix use this approach.

Who makes the final decision on the level of the language skills requirement?

The Recruiting Manager working with their Head of Service will need to consider the language skills requirement for all posts, and to ensure that they comply with their service area language plans.

Assessing Skills Levels beyond Basic Courtesy

How will you assess for skills at levels 1-5?

Language skills will be assessed either during the interview, or as part of any other assessments at the interview stage.

Who will administer the assessments?

You will be assessed either by the interview panel, or by a member of Commission staff.

How have the assessments been designed?

The assessments are based entirely on the skills required for each individual post. The purpose of the assessments will be to ascertain whether a candidate has the appropriate skills to undertake the tasks required for that role.

If a post requires level 4 speaking and understanding skills, and the interview/assessments are conducted through the medium of Welsh, how will my English Language Skills be tested?

Where language skills are assessed as part of the formal interview, candidates will be required to conduct part of the interview in Welsh, and part of the interview in English.

What does this mean for me as an applicant?

You will be required to provide a statement on your application form - which you’ll be prompted for - that you believe you have the necessary language skills as set out in the job description. Language skills will be assessed during the interview stage of the selection process.

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