

# Official Languages Scheme: Annual Report 2021-22

June 2022



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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**Welsh Parliament**  
**Cardiff Bay**  
**CF99 1SN**

Tel: **0300 200 6565**

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# **Official Languages Scheme:** Annual Report 2021-22

June 2022





**Senedd Cymru**  
**Welsh Parliament**

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## Foreword

This annual report details our performance and work on the provision of bilingual services over the past year, and concludes the Fifth Senedd's Official Languages Scheme.

The team's work has primarily focused on preparing for the Sixth Senedd, which included drafting and consulting on a new Official Languages Scheme, making arrangements for the transition from the Fifth to the Sixth Senedd and supporting new Members.

Without a shadow of a doubt, one of the year's highlights was the Sixth Senedd's official opening. Bilingualism was an integral part of this event, with contributions and performances naturally making use of our two official languages as part of the celebrations.

This year, we welcomed new Members of the Senedd by providing a comprehensive programme of sessions to help them feel at home at Senedd Cymru, the Welsh Parliament. The programme included sessions by the Official Languages Scheme Team on bilingual working, which were attended by a number of Members of the Senedd and their support staff. The team has also seen a number of Members and support staff resuming their Welsh lessons or taking up the language for the first time following the Senedd election.

This year, the percentage of contributions to proceedings made through the medium of Welsh has, once again, increased. This is a reflection of the support available to Members to contribute in their preferred language. However, whilst bilingual proceedings are the norm at Senedd Cymru, with many participants feeling confident and comfortable in using both languages, we need to do even more to encourage confidence to use Welsh and to understand any barriers. The aim is to ensure that the recent positive pattern continues.

It is important to note that we have not received any official complaints this year, and that instances of failure to comply with the scheme's requirements were few. Despite this, we immediately investigated any instances that did come to our attention to discover what the issue was, and swift remedial action was taken where needed. We have also noted any lessons to be learnt. The official languages team will continue to monitor these instances and will advise colleagues

accordingly as we introduce and implement the Sixth Senedd's official languages scheme over the coming months.

It gives me great pleasure to present this report, and I look forward to beginning the work of introducing the Sixth Senedd's official languages scheme soon.



Rhun ap Iorwerth MS  
Commissioner with responsibility for Official Languages



## Our Performance

### Our ambition, commitment and values

"Our ambition is to become a truly bilingual organisation where Members of the Senedd, the public and staff can choose to work or communicate naturally in either or both of our official languages, where the use of both languages is proactively encouraged and facilitated, and where our exemplary bilingual services are continuously improving."

This year, the work of the Official Languages Team has focused primarily on planning, drafting and consulting on the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd. The draft Plan for consultation has been agreed and the consultation is underway. Members of the Senedd and their Support Staff and Senedd Commission Staff were offered opportunities to comment on the content and format of the draft. In line with the strategic aim of the Commission to have citizens at the heart of everything we do, and the requirements of the Official Languages Act, there has also been an opportunity for the people of Wales to comment. These comments were considered when drafting the Scheme for the Sixth Senedd.

The Senedd is an organisation that operates on the basis of our values, and those values reflect the commitment to ensuring diversity across the organisation. We value and encourage diversity within our workforce. We value every member of our staff – no matter their level of bilingualism – for their commitment to the Senedd and for their professional and parliamentary expertise. The principles of the dignity and respect policy are at the heart of everything we do. We expect all staff to be committed to providing first-class parliamentary support and services to Members, their support staff and the public in both our official languages.

Our aim in presenting and implementing our Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd will be to maintain those high standards and expectations, and to ensure that we do not rest on our laurels. Members of the Sixth Senedd will hold us to account on behalf of the people of Wales.



## Service Standards

The second year of the Coronavirus pandemic has meant that the Senedd has once again focused on flexibility and ensuring that first-class bilingual services can be provided regardless of the level of restrictions. As Senedd business has moved from fully virtual meetings to a hybrid format in line with the latest advice and restrictions, we have also been planning for a return to a situation more akin to that which existed before March 2020. However, it is important that we draw on the lessons learned over the past two years, and use our new ways of working to maintain standards and improve our bilingual services.

This year has also been a year of changes, with the Dissolution period and the Senedd election. As a third of Members elected were completely new to the organisation, the induction process was extremely important at a time when it was not always possible to meet face to face. Despite the difficulties, a full induction programme was provided to all Members according to their individual needs and in their preferred language through a combination of online and in-person sessions. The programme included a session on the Official Languages Scheme, and about learning Welsh or improving language skills at the Senedd. A number of former Members who had been receiving training from the team returned to learn, and a number of new Members have also registered either to learn Welsh or to improve their language skills. In addition, regular induction sessions on working bilingually and the provision for learning Welsh or improving language skills are given to support staff and Senedd Commission staff joining the organisation.

Following the Senedd election, and as restrictions allowed, the Official Opening of the Sixth Senedd took place in October 2021. The emphasis of the day was on celebrating Wales, and various performances and compositions were commissioned for the day. During the ceremony in the Siambr there was a

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reading of a bilingual poem, 'Ein Llais, Your Voice', specially composed for the occasion by Gruffudd Owen, Bardd Plant Cymru [Welsh-language Children's Laureate]. The poem was read by two former Members of the Welsh Youth Parliament. Both of our official languages were an integral part of the event, with both languages used naturally throughout the day.

### **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. In the months following the Senedd election all new Members were offered the opportunity to meet the Head of the Translation and Reporting Service and Manager of the Official Languages Scheme so that they could understand more about working bilingually within the Senedd. Sessions were provided to Members from all political parties, either individually, or in groups. The sessions were an opportunity to hear the views of new Members on the services provided during the first few weeks of the Sixth Senedd, and to understand more about their expectations and wishes going forward. The Official Languages Team is always prepared to receive feedback from Members and their staff and to adapt any services to meet their needs. We will be holding virtual and in-person drop-in sessions so that Members and their staff have the opportunity to comment on the Official Languages Scheme of the Sixth Senedd as part of the consultation prior to its adoption.

### **Sharing Expertise**

As usual we have once again this year taken the opportunity to offer help and support to organisations across Wales and beyond. We are always prepared to discuss our experiences and share lessons learned over the ten years since the Official Languages Act 2012 came into force. Indeed, as we look back over the course of the Fifth Senedd and draft our Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd, one of our objectives is to do more of this work, using established international networks.

This year, Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business, accepted an invitation to join an expert panel discussion for a Languages in Parliament Seminar under the auspices of the CSPG-GCEP (Canadian Study of Parliament Group). It was an opportunity to explain the situation regarding our Official Languages in Wales and in the Senedd, and to talk about our pioneering work in areas such as machine translation and language technology. It was also an opportunity to discuss some of the practical and political issues we face in a bilingual legislature, and to highlight the success of our virtual Senedd. Favourable comments were received following the panel discussion.

The Official Languages Team also had the opportunity to discuss our experiences in introducing the language skills matrix as part of the recruitment process with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. Representatives from the Translation and Reporting Service also recently discussed our use of technology for the management of translation work, as well as our use of language technology in translating documents, with a representative from Natural Resources Wales.



Senedd Cymru  
Welsh Parliament



## Statistical Information

With the arrangements for conducting Senedd business online, virtually, or in hybrid form in place, and a number of new Members of the Senedd, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of contributions made in Welsh. This increase is attributable to a number of changes to the way Members contribute to proceedings. As the Senedd moves towards the next stage of returning to business we will use the lessons learned to ensure that we continue to support Members and witnesses to use their preferred official language. We must continuously look for ways to encourage confidence to use Welsh.

### Recruitment

As restrictions have been eased, it has been possible to offer a combination of virtual and in-person interviews. We have continued to offer interviews to candidates in the language of their choice, and have found ways to test candidates' language skills as part of the recruitment process. The Official Languages Team has been working on the content of the Courtesy level Welsh assessment and has piloted it with a few individuals; fine-tuning will continue before the new-look assessment is introduced early next year.

**Table 1: 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
<b>2018-19</b>	54	35		19
<b>2019-20</b>	49	28	3	18
<b>2020-21</b>	21	14		7
<b>2021-22</b>	47	32		15

**Internal**

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
<b>2018-19</b>	18	11		7
<b>2019-20</b>	22	16	1	5
<b>2020-21</b>	18	12		6
<b>2021-22</b>	20	9		11

**Total**

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
<b>2018-19</b>	72	46		26
<b>2019-20</b>	71	44	4	23
<b>2020-21</b>	39	26		13
<b>2021-22</b>	67	41		26

## Percentages

	Courtesy level posts	Combination of skills*	Level 1 - 5 posts
<b>2018-19</b>	64%		36%
<b>2019-20</b>	62%	6%	32%
<b>2020-21</b>	67%		33%
<b>2021-22</b>	61%		39%

\* A combination of skills is used when verbal skills are required at levels 1-5 in a job, but no higher written skills or courtesy skills are required.

## Senedd business

At the beginning of the year there was an inevitable reduction in the number of Senedd business meetings held as we moved to Dissolution and the establishment of the Sixth Senedd following the Senedd election.

**Table 2: Percentage of business submitted in Welsh or bilingually per item**

Year	Oral Questions	Written Questions	Motions	Amendments	Statements of Opinion	Topical Questions			
<b>2017-18</b>	13%	7%	2%	7%	2%	10%			
<b>2018-19</b>	11%	10%	3%	14%	5%	15%			
<b>2019-20</b>	8%	8%	4%	4%	0%	9%			
<b>2020-21</b>	8%	6%	2%	0%	5%	16%			
<b>2021-22</b>	14%	4%	2%	11%	4%	11%	10%	3%	18%

This year, the system for collating statistical information was modified in order to reflect business submitted bilingually.

**Table 3: Laid documents**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of documents laid</b>	<b>Number of documents not laid bilingually</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>2017-18</b>	431	109	25%
<b>2018-19</b>	1187	310	26%
<b>2019-20</b>	808	141	17.5%
<b>2020-21</b>	1442	98	7%
<b>2021-22</b>	930	69	7%

Documents prepared by the Senedd Commission are prepared and laid bilingually. This year, there were two exceptions where documents including independent legal advice were laid in English only.

### **Proceedings**

As mentioned above, there has been a slight reduction in the volume of Senedd business as a result of the Dissolution and the establishment of the Sixth Senedd following the Senedd election. All papers for Plenary and committee meetings are available bilingually and the Official Languages Team is available to assist Members wishing to make contributions in Welsh as required. The support available to Members has not changed over the past year, other than the fact that we are now in a position to resume in-person sessions with Members if they so wish.

**Table 4: Percentage of contributions in Welsh**

Type of contribution	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2017-18	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2018-19	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2019-20	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2020-21	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2021-22
<b>Plenary Proceedings</b>	20%	18%	16%	23%	30%
<b>Committee Proceedings</b>	8%	7%	6%	9%	12%

## Committees

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 bilingual. The unique arrangements for briefing the members of each committee, including when and in what form the briefing papers are required, have continued with the appointment of Chairs and members of committees of the Sixth Senedd. As part of the process of establishing the committees of the Sixth Senedd, the integrated teams discussed Members' wishes, in terms of briefing material and working in the language of their choice, with individual Members.

**Table 5: Papers published by Senedd committees in Welsh only**

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
<b>Internally prepared papers</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Responses submitted to consultations</b>	13	51	*	*	*
<b>Secretary of State for Wales and UK Government</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Welsh Government</b>	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Individual Members</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>External individuals or organisations</b>	9	21	22	13	16

\* Data on responses to consultations is no longer retained due to a change in the method of publishing responses

**Table 6: Papers published by Senedd committees in English only**

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
<b>Internally prepared papers</b>	40 **	96 **	13**	25***	18***
<b>Responses submitted to consultations</b>	438	628	*	*	*
<b>Secretary of State for Wales and UK Government</b>	23	52	13	37	16
<b>Welsh Government</b>	174	263	218	194	47
<b>Individual Members</b>	3	3	5	0	3
<b>External individuals or organisations</b>	659	727	804	587	377

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\*\* Direct responses to correspondence received in English. In accordance with the Scheme, any written responses to correspondence from individuals or organisations is drafted and published in the preferred language of the recipient of our correspondence.

\*\*\* A combination of technical papers to the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and letters from Committee chairs in the language of the recipient's choice published for information to Committee members.

**Table 7: Papers published by Senedd committees bilingually**

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
<b>Internally prepared papers</b>	1172	781	864	1149	799
<b>Responses submitted to consultations</b>	218	131	*	*	*
<b>Secretary of State for Wales and UK Government</b>	8	7	4	9	3
<b>Welsh Government</b>	580	993	898	1599	790
<b>Individual Members</b>	6	11	4	0	3
<b>External individuals or organisations</b>	337	361	243	218	211



## Themes for the operational phase of the Scheme

### **Theme 1: Recruitment**

The recruitment method using the Language Skills Matrix and placing a requirement for Courtesy level Welsh language skills or above for all posts advertised is now well established. During the Fifth Senedd, the Official Languages Team, in conjunction with the Recruitment Team, gathered feedback and consequentially have been adapting or refining as necessary. This has led to a series of actions that will be incorporated into the themes for the duration of the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd. We will continue to look for ways to provide clear and digestible information about the language skills system and requirements in order to attract the best possible candidates for each post.

### **Theme 2: Language Skills**

The retirement of a member of staff within the Official Languages team has led to an opportunity for restructuring. The capacity of the tutoring team has been increased to enable us to provide further support to Members, support staff and Commission staff. With the team now in place, we will be working on even more flexible and specialist provision. Some of our learners will be sitting WJEC examinations over the coming year, which will be an opportunity for them to receive recognition for their dedication and hard work undertaken during the pandemic period. The team will also actively attract new learners across the organisation, whether in the form of former learners or Members or support staff who have joined since the Senedd election in May.

### **Theme 3: Language Planning**

Following the restructuring of several teams across the Senedd Commission, their Service Language Plans have been reviewed in detail. These reviews have also led to meaningful changes and the adoption of good practice from other teams. Heads of service review their plans annually as part of the process of producing the Corporate Statement of Assurance. At the same time, the Bilingual Skills Strategy was reviewed, and a decision was made to combine the strategy with the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd.

## **Theme 4: Proceedings**

Statistical information shows an increase in the percentage of Welsh-medium contributions made in Plenary and committee meetings for over a year, with the most significant increase occurring since the May 2021 Senedd election. We will include a number of actions in the themes for the duration of the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd to ensure that we have a greater understanding of what has led to the increase, and to ensure that this pattern continues.

## **Theme 5: Developing the bilingual ethos of the organisation**

### **Awareness**

The team also revised the Courtesy level Welsh assessment to enable the assessment to be carried out online or in-person, and the pronunciation module available to new Senedd Commission staff was reviewed to assist them with the assessment. In the coming year, the team will work on producing awareness training on bilingual working to accompany the refreshed pronunciation training. The content of the awareness video for new Senedd Commission staff was reviewed, and new segments were recorded. There are plans to create a series of videos and resources to support the awareness training.

## Monitoring and Compliance

The ethos and culture of the Senedd, and the way in which we provide bilingual services, have been completely transformed. We now provide bilingual services by default, with the emphasis on how to achieve the highest possible standards in doing so. The fact that the mindset is embedded among Senedd Commission staff means that we are seeing fewer instances of failure to comply with the Scheme, and fewer complaints about our provision.

However, the introduction and adoption of the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd and the attendant changes and improvements could possibly lead to a few initial misunderstandings or mistakes. The team will monitor very carefully with the support of the work of the Official Languages Co-ordinators, and the Corporate Risk system to identify any such cases at an early stage. The Sixth Senedd Official Languages Scheme will include a specific section on how to contact us to offer feedback, and on the Senedd Commission's complaints procedure.

The Official Languages Team and the Official Languages Co-ordinators record any complaints or failures to comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Scheme. Feedback, whether positive, or suggesting changes that can be made, is highly valuable. We are committed to considering all comments received for learning and improvement, and this will include all comments and suggestions received through the consultation process on the new Scheme.

This year no formal complaints were received about our provision. The Official Languages Scheme Co-ordinators Forum met to discuss issues relating to the Scheme. Other internal processes for monitoring compliance also proceed 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 cases relate to two areas:

**Lack of clarity about the process of arranging simultaneous interpretation at events sponsored by Members of the Senedd.**

The Senedd Commission is now in a position, with restrictions easing, to reopen the Senedd estate to host events. Feedback was received that the process of arranging simultaneous interpretation at Member sponsored events was not entirely clear. Having discussed this with the person who had submitted the feedback, the team changed the event booking form to better reflect the reality. Officials discussing events with organisers will also reinforce the message that simultaneous interpretation can also be arranged for such events.

**An error in publishing evidence provided to a committee by a public body on our website.**

A member of the public contacted the particular committee to advise that the evidence from the external body was not available bilingually on our website, despite the fact that the body itself had provided the evidence in both languages. The matter was investigated as a matter of urgency, and the error confirmed. The bilingual version of the evidence was published immediately after the error came to light, and an apology was presented. No further comments were received.