

Official Languages Scheme: Annual Report 2020-21

June 2021



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

It gives me great pleasure to present the final annual report on the Official Languages Scheme for the Fifth Senedd.

This year, our intention was to ensure that we had met the objectives set at the beginning of the Fifth Senedd and to start planning for the Sixth Senedd. Much of our work this year has also focused on providing our services in a different way, namely in the virtual sphere, and ensuring that Senedd Cymru, the Welsh Parliament, can continue to legislate and hold the Welsh Government to account at such an unprecedented time.

Movement restrictions were already in place at the beginning of the period covered by this report, and the Senedd was one of the first national parliaments to hold fully bilingual virtual Plenary meetings. Throughout the year, organisations from Wales and beyond have engaged with us to seek advice and guidance, and it is a source of great pride that we are, yet again, in the vanguard in the field of technology and bilingual services. We will continue to be guided by our recent experiences as we develop bilingual services that are fit for the future.

The past year has undoubtedly been challenging for everyone. The fact that we have continued to operate by switching our work to online platforms, without losing the ability to provide bilingual services as a default, is testament to the fact that we are a bilingual organisation in the true sense of the word. Certainly, providing bilingual services as a default and without exception is an inherent part of our mindset as an organisation. Despite this, it is important that we continue to lead by example and that we aim for excellence at all times.



Rhun ap Iorwerth

Commissioner with responsibility for Official Languages



RESPECT

We are inclusive, kind, and value each other's contributions in delivering excellent services



PASSION

We are purposeful in our support of democracy and pull together to make a difference for the people of Wales



PRIDE

We embrace innovation and celebrate our achievements together as a team

WE ARE ONE TEAM

Our Performance

Our ambition, our commitment and our 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.

We are proud of the progress that has been made during the Fifth Senedd, and of the fact that we are now recognised as a truly bilingual body. Our high standards and practical approach towards the provision of exemplary bilingual services as a default are an example to other organisations. It would not have been possible to achieve this without the strong leadership of the Senedd Commission, the Executive Board and the Leadership Team. Our values, and the way in which we develop and implement strategies and policies, reflect the equal status of our two official languages.

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.

As we transition to the Sixth Senedd, we will need to maintain these high standards and expectations, and 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 COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions have inevitably led to changes being made to our working practices. The Senedd moved swiftly to adopt virtual ways of working, then, as the restrictions were eased, a hybrid format. All Members, support staff and Commission staff are currently working from home.

Our plans for business continuity meant that we were well placed to continue providing our bilingual services, and that we could make a swift and smooth transition to virtual provision.

The Senedd was one of the first legislatures to hold virtual Plenary meetings with interpretation available from the outset. The Senedd was presented as a case study in the Welsh Language Commissioner's Advice Note on holding bilingual meetings by videoconference and we continue to advise organisations across Wales on the provision of interpretation as part of virtual proceedings. On occasion, we have been unable to provide interpretation in specific meetings and events due to the confidential nature of the discussions and concerns regarding the security of the digital platform available at the time. However, this software has recently been upgraded, which provides greater assurance regarding online security. This has, in turn, enabled us to provide an on-demand interpretation service. The Senedd Commission's risk and assurance system was used to record any actions taken and mitigations adopted, and to monitor and provide assurance regarding the relevant issues at all levels.

Over the past year, delivering bilingual provision as a default has been at the heart of all work to develop new services or to adapt existing ones. Where it has not been possible to deliver bilingual provision, every effort has been made to ensure that stakeholders can choose one or the other of our official languages. The Official Languages Team has been monitoring our bilingual services and advising colleagues across the Senedd. On those rare occasions when it was not possible in practical terms to meet the standards set out in the Official Languages Scheme, the incident was noted, as were any steps taken to mitigate and ensure that the same situation did not arise again.

Alongside this work, the Official Languages Team has also been working on preparations for the Sixth Senedd. Discussions were held with the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd, Heads of Service, some Directors and Group Chiefs of Staff to understand which elements of our bilingual provision are currently working well and to identify where improvements can be made. The team is already working on the development of a draft Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd. A consultation on the new Scheme will need to be held, and the Scheme itself agreed, as soon as possible after the election. The team has also been reviewing our provision with regard to language skills training to ensure that this provision continues to be flexible and tailored to meet current needs. This work will continue over the coming months.

Feedback from Members of the Senedd and their support staff

To ensure that Members and their support staff are able to work effectively in their preferred language, it is vital that we understand their needs and preferences. This year, with all of the changes that had to be made at such short notice, the results of the Member and Support Staff Satisfaction Survey have yielded information about the elements that have worked well and any areas that need to be reconsidered. Both groups were asked about the general support they received to enable them to work in their preferred language. The scores were slightly lower than in the survey undertaken in 2019. However, the feedback on the whole continues to be encouraging. Any additional comments were responded to and, if possible, discussed with the individuals who made them in order to agree steps that could be taken to improve our provision.

In addition to the formal satisfaction survey, the Official Languages Team monitors any feedback received via informal means. This may include feedback from the committees' integrated teams, the support staff executive group and the language buddies' activities, as well as all other opportunities for engagement with Members or their support staff.

Sharing expertise

The restrictions on movement have meant that it has not been possible for us to meet face to face with colleagues across the public sector and beyond this year. However, we have continued to offer advice and support to a number of bodies. This year, we have advised a large number of bodies on the virtual provision of bilingual services. The interpretation team and the ICT team have advised on the provision of interpretation on digital platforms, and the Senedd was used as a case study by the Welsh Language Commissioner in his Advice Note on virtual meetings. In March of this year, the Director of Communications and Engagement



Statistical information

Throughout the Fifth Senedd, we have gathered statistical information to help us to prioritise our work from one year to the next. Reviewing this information will assist us as we seek to prioritise work and resources and set objectives as the Sixth Assembly is established.

Recruitment

Over the past year, the pandemic has driven us to change our recruitment methods. For over a year, it has not been possible to hold face-to-face interviews and assessments. However, we have continued to offer interviews to candidates in their preferred language, and have found ways of assessing candidates' language skills as part of the recruitment process. The process for assessing courtesy-level Welsh has had to be adapted slightly, but the team is trialling new methods of digital assessment. Work on assessment will continue. Also, this year, the Senedd has adopted a new online recruitment system. In accordance with the Official Languages Scheme's requirements, the system allows candidates to apply for posts in their preferred language, and to choose in which language they wish to engage with us.

Table 1: Number of posts advertised requiring courtesy-level Welsh, or a higher level of language skills.

External

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2018-19	54	35		19
2019-20	49	28	3	18
2020-21	21	14		7

Internal

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

Total

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2018-19	72	46		26
2019-20	71	44	4	23
2020-21	39	26		13

Percentages

	Courtesy-level posts	Combination of skills*	Posts at level 1-5
2018-19	64%		36%
2019-20	62%	6%	32%
2020-21	67%		33%

* A combination of skills is used when the post requires speaking and listening skills at level 1-5, but written skills at Courtesy level.

Senedd business

The beginning of the year saw a reduction in the Senedd's business as we moved to virtual platforms and adapted to remote working. However, Members' ability to table business or lay documents in their preferred language has not changed.

The figures provided below do not include motions and amendments tabled by the Welsh Government as these are always submitted bilingually.

Table 2: Percentage of business submitted in Welsh, by item

Year	OQ	WQ	Motions	Amendments	Statements of opinion	Topical questions
2017-18	13%	7%	2%	7%	2%	10%
2018-19	11%	10%	3%	14%	5%	15%
2019-20	8%	8%	4%	4%	0%	9%
2020-21	8%	6%	2%	0%	5%	16%

Table 3: Documents laid

Year	Number of documents laid	Number of documents not laid bilingually	Percentage
2017-18	431	109	25%
2018-19	1187	310	26%
2019-20	808	141	17.5%
2020-21	1442	98	7%

Documents prepared by the Senedd Commission are drawn up and laid bilingually.

This year, the Senedd Commission laid one document in English only, namely a document containing legal advice from a third party commissioned on behalf of the Standards Committee.

Proceedings

As mentioned above, there was a slight reduction in Senedd business as we moved to virtual platforms. However, before introducing systems and software for virtual meetings, we ensured that interpretation was available as a default and that Members were able to contribute in their preferred language. All papers for Plenary and committee meetings are available bilingually and the Official Languages Team is available on request to support Members who wish to contribute in Welsh. The support available to Members has not changed over the past year, other than the fact that this support is now provided online rather than face to face.

Table 4: Percentage of contributions made 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
Plenary proceedings	20%	18%	16%	23%
Committee proceedings	8%	7%	6%	9%

Committees

It is vital that Members of the Senedd are able to prepare for committee meetings in their preferred language. Committee papers compiled by the Senedd Commission are available in both languages, and the committee teams emphasise the need for evidence and papers by third parties to be submitted bilingually too. The tailored arrangements to brief members of different committees, including when briefing papers should be provided and in what format, have continued. These arrangements are based on the requirements and wishes of committee members, and are reviewed by the relevant integrated team on a regular basis or when changes are made to a committee's membership. As part of the process of establishing the Sixth Senedd's committees, it is vital that the integrated teams discuss each individual Member's needs regarding briefing materials and their preferred language.

Table 5: Papers published by Senedd committees in Welsh only

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Papers drawn up internally	0	0	0	0
Responses to consultations	13	51	*	*
Secretary of State for Wales and the UK Government	0	0	0	0
Welsh Government	0	0	0	1
Individual Members	0	0	0	0
External organisations or individuals	9	21	22	13

Table 6: Papers published by Senedd committees in English only

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Papers drawn up internally	40**	96*	13**	25***
Responses to consultations	438	628	*	*
Secretary of State for Wales and the UK Government	23	52	13	37
Welsh Government	174	263	218	194
Individual Members	3	3	5	0
External organisations or individuals	659	727	804	587

* Data regarding responses to consultations are no longer held due to a change in the method of publishing responses

** Direct responses to correspondence received in English. In accordance with the Scheme, any written responses to correspondence from individuals or organisations are drafted and published in the preferred language of those in receipt of correspondence by the Senedd.

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

Table 7: Papers published bilingually by Senedd committees

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Papers drawn up internally	1172	781	864	1149
Responses to consultations	218	131	*	*
Secretary of State for Wales and the UK Government	8	7	4	9
Welsh Government	580	993	898	1599
Individual Members	6	11	4	0
External organisations or individuals	337	361	243	218

Themes from the Scheme's period of operation

Over the past year, the Official Languages Team has begun the process of reviewing the Official Languages Scheme for the Fifth Senedd.

We have met with the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd, heads of individual services, some directors and Group Chiefs of Staff to discuss what has worked well and areas that we need to prioritise for the Sixth Senedd. We also reviewed progress made on the themes set for the Scheme's period of operation.

Theme 1: Recruitment

With the online recruitment system now operational, the Official Languages Team has begun the process of looking at our methods of assessing language skills. Due to the fact that we have been unable to hold face-to-face language skills assessments over the past year, it was decided that the timetable for courtesy-level Welsh assessments would be changed. The team has developed a virtual assessment for the pronunciation element and an online assessment for the remaining elements. Following a trial period, this assessment will be used for every courtesy-level Welsh assessment. By the same token, the past year has given us an opportunity to reconsider the language skills assessments for posts requiring skills at levels 1-3. This work will continue as we set objectives and themes for the Sixth Senedd's Official Languages Scheme. We will hold discussions with the Leadership Team, the Executive Board, Commission staff and the trade unions before introducing any permanent changes.

Theme 2: Language skills

The combination of a shift to an online service and staffing changes has given us an opportunity to review our language skills provision. During the year, we started the work of evaluating this provision to ensure that it continues to provide flexible training tailored to the needs of learners and the Senedd. We will continue this work at the beginning of the Sixth Senedd. In drawing up an Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd, we will need to review our systems for setting targets for learners and providing appropriate language skills training for specific parts of the organisation. We will also focus on supporting staff who have learnt Welsh or are fluent Welsh speakers but have not had an opportunity to use their skills in the workplace to regain the confidence to do so. As Members of the Sixth Senedd and their support staff go through the induction process, we will prioritise

the need to understand their learning needs and to develop appropriate language skills training for them.

Theme 3: Language planning

All of the Senedd's service areas use their individual language schemes to plan their capacity for providing exceptional bilingual services. Throughout the Fifth Senedd, the service-area language scheme system has become established, and services use their schemes when filling vacant posts. At the beginning of the Sixth Senedd, the service-area language schemes will need to be reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and to reflect any changes to business or systems following the Senedd election. We will also consider how the Bilingual Skills Strategy can be incorporated into the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd. The Official Languages Act requires us to produce a strategy to ensure that the Senedd's staff have the language skills that they need to implement the Scheme. At present, the strategy exists as a separate entity to the Scheme itself, but we will work on consolidating the two documents in due course.

Theme 4: Proceedings

The Senedd Commission's innovative work on bilingualism and the use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic has continued throughout the year. On 1 April 2020, the first virtual meeting of the Emergency Senedd was held entirely bilingually, with participants free to contribute and listen to the proceedings in their preferred language. Additional business was gradually introduced, and a timetable was also set for virtual committee meetings. During the spring and summer, as the situation regarding COVID restrictions improved, systems and arrangements were adapted to allow hybrid meetings to be held. With a proportion of Members present in the Chamber and the remainder joining online, the provision again enabled all participants to take part in their preferred language as a default. Organisations the length and breadth of the country have contacted us to discuss our work, and we have offered advice on interpretation in online meetings to a number of bodies, including:

- Gwynedd Council;
- Isle of Anglesey County Council;
- Bangor University;
- Aberystwyth University;
- Political Parties in the Senedd;

- Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner;
- Carmarthenshire County Council;
- The Learned Society;
- The Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters;
- Schools;
- Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.
- NHS Wales Health Collaborative
- National Museum Wales;
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council;
- Welsh Government;
- Scottish Parliament.

Theme 5: Developing the organisation's bilingual ethos

Awareness

Throughout the year, despite the fact that we have all been working from home, we have continued to hold events to promote use of the Welsh language and bilingual working. This includes Diwrnod Shwmae - Su'mae, Welsh Music Day, St Dwynwen's Day and St David's Day. Much use was made of the Yammer facility and the staff and Members' intranet on the Senedd system. The Official Languages Team has also worked in partnership with the staff networks to provide materials and advice. The team collaborated on a suite of resources to support mental health and learning at home. Also, a campaign was launched to encourage colleagues to engage with each other to avoid feelings of loneliness and to improve their mental health by using and practising their Welsh language skills. Any planned activities for the staff as a whole or smaller groups of staff offer an opportunity for all participants to use their preferred official language.

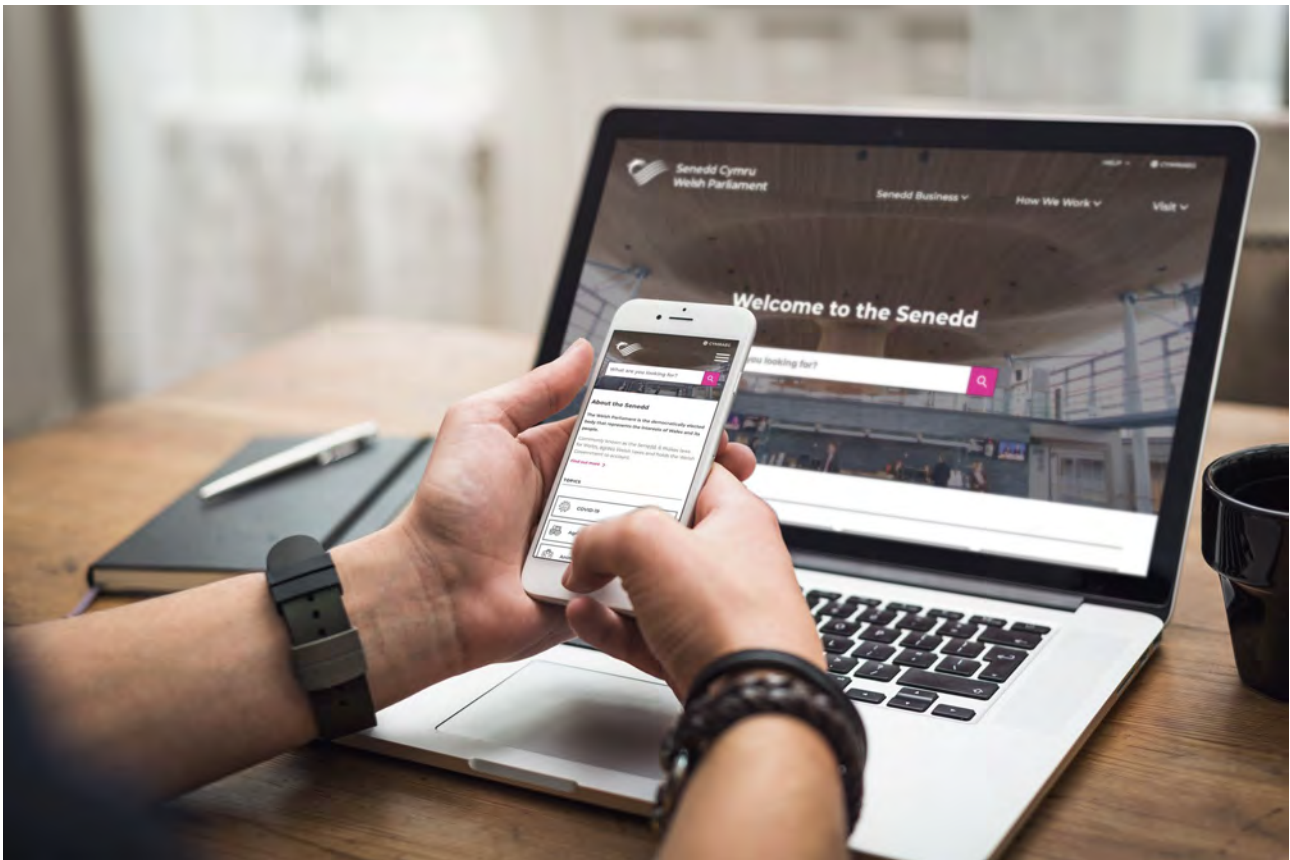
The task of ensuring that all new members of staff (whether Senedd Commission staff or support staff) understand our ethos as a bilingual organisation continues. Over the past year, induction sessions have been held virtually, and these sessions are available in Welsh or English. Due to the pandemic, there was no opportunity to finish work on the awareness-raising video for Senedd staff. This will resume when the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd has been agreed. We have also been collaborating with the team responsible for planning the transition from the Fifth Senedd to the Sixth to ensure that provision is fully bilingual, and that new Members are aware of the Scheme's requirements as well as the support available to them to enable them to work in their preferred official language.

Technology

A great deal of our work over the past year has focused on technology. As it was not possible to meet face to face at all, the Senedd had to develop virtual methods of service delivery. In addition to virtual meetings and the steps taken to ensure that Members could undertake their duties in their preferred language, other elements had to be developed from scratch, including an app enabling Members to vote during official proceedings. Engagement with the people of Wales has always been an important element of the Senedd's work. Our estate, specifically the Senedd and Pierhead buildings, was an integral part of this mission. With the estate closed, we had to think of other ways of sharing information about our buildings and our work. Virtual tours were developed to guide visitors around our buildings from the comfort of their own homes, thereby offering an opportunity to learn more about specific parts of the estate. All tours were, of course, available bilingually.

One of the main changes witnessed by the organisation over the past year was the introduction of our new website. The website is the result of several years' hard work to ensure that we deliver a service that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of our stakeholders. An important element of the work done while developing the new website was finding a solution to the fact that English-medium web pages occasionally appeared in Welsh versions of the previous site. We have received a number of complaints about this issue over the years. This was primarily the result of an error made when publishing information to the website. For the new website, a system was designed that requires those publishing information to create content in both languages and makes it easier to check both versions side by side. Since the new website went live, we have not received any complaints about content being presented in the incorrect language, nor have we received links to content in the incorrect language.

The Senedd Commission has also kept in touch with Microsoft to ensure that it is updated on any developments in the field of language technology. Specifically, we have asked for Microsoft Teams to receive a software update that would include an interpretation facility so that we can provide this service via Teams. This would respond to many of the concerns expressed about other digital platforms' security. We will continue to nurture our relationship with Microsoft during the Sixth Senedd, and will make proactive and innovative use of technology to provide bilingual services.



Monitoring and compliance

The Official Languages Team and the Official Languages Co-ordinators keep a record of any complaints received or examples of failure to comply with the Scheme's requirements.

During our review of the Fifth Senedd's Official Languages Scheme, we received feedback suggesting that the Scheme for the Sixth Senedd should include clear information about the complaints process. With this in mind, as we develop the new Scheme, we will ensure that information about the complaints process, as well as contact details for providing feedback on our bilingual services, is clearly stated and given due prominence. Feedback, whether positive or negative, is valuable, as are suggestions for change, and we are committed to considering all comments received to help us to learn and improve.

In this extraordinary year, we have received no complaints about our provision. The Official Language Scheme Co-ordinators' Forum has continued to meet to discuss issues related to the Scheme, and other internal processes for monitoring compliance have also been followed consistently. These processes have demonstrated that we have occasionally failed to reach the high standards that are set out in the Scheme, or have been at risk of failing to fulfil the expectations of our service users. These cases have related to two areas:

Enabling Members to use their preferred language in private and confidential meetings

All of the Senedd's formal, public proceedings that were broadcast took place on the Zoom digital platform. This platform enables us to provide an interpretation service as a default to everyone taking part in a meeting. There was general concern regarding the platform's cybersecurity for many public bodies in Wales. It was decided that it would be wise not to use the platform for private meetings or meetings where confidential matters would be discussed. Therefore, on occasion, Members had to compromise in terms of their preferred language in order to be able to take part in these secure meetings. However, following a Zoom upgrade, the security provision is now satisfactory, which means that the platform can again be used for any meeting where interpretation is required. As mentioned above, the Commission's risk and assurance procedure was applied to record and

monitor the situation, and the Executive Board and Risk and Assurance Committee were kept informed throughout.

Matters related to Members

A few comments regarding our bilingual services were received via the Member and support staff satisfaction survey. As part of the survey, individuals were able to provide their contact details so that a member of the Official Languages Team could get in touch to discuss any issues raised. Any comments made were discussed with the individual, and feedback was recorded so that the relevant lessons could be learnt. We have also reflected on all comments made anonymously, and we will refer to these as we develop the Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd.