

Official Languages Scheme: Annual Report 2023-24

June 2024



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 in accordance with the requirements of the Official Languages Act 2012. This annual report looks at our work and performance in relation to the provision of bilingual services over the past year.

This year we have conducted a Welsh language skills survey across all Senedd Commission staff. The skills survey shows positive signs that suggest a reduction in the percentage of staff with no Welsh language skills, and an increase in language skills at Levels 1-3. This indicates that the decision to introduce Courtesy-level Welsh in the last Senedd has provided a solid baseline on which to build, and demonstrates the organisation's potential to continue to aim even higher in future.

Work has also started on reviewing the language plans of service areas. This work will monitor bilingual capacity across the organisation, ensuring that we continue to provide outstanding bilingual services.

Also, in line with my commitment last year on the floor of the chamber, we have considered the support available to Members of the Senedd to enable them to contribute in the language of their choice, and to do so confidently during proceedings. Nevertheless, we remain concerned about the patterns of Welsh language use, both written and oral, in relation to Senedd business that are shown in the latest data. I will discuss with my fellow Members of the Commission and other key forums, such as the Committee Chairs' Forum, what further practical measures can be put in place over the coming months with a view, initially, to attempt to restore performance to previous levels, and, in due course, to encouraging greater use of Welsh as Members and their staff table their written business and make oral contributions in Welsh in Plenary and Committee proceedings.

Over the coming year, with the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill having passed Stage 4 and soon to be enacted and as the parliamentary progress of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill continues, the preparations for the new Senedd in 2026 will proceed to a new phase. Senedd reform legislation provides an exciting opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved so far in terms of our principal democratic body in Wales, and our democracy more generally, and to imagine and re-imagine our ambition in a new context. It is crucial that we take a fresh look at how we ensure - in relation to our ways of working, our service provision and our ethos, and in relation to the legal

framework that drives this work - that the use and status of the Welsh language has a central and prominent place in the life and work of the Senedd. As Members, partners, and, of course, as citizens of Wales, I want us to challenge each other and ask: what more needs to be done to ensure that we can engage fully and without hindrance in the business and work of the Senedd in Welsh, as is currently possible in English? How can we ensure that Welsh is truly equal to English in our proceedings and in the administration of the Senedd? And most importantly, how are we accountable to the people we serve – the citizens of Wales – for our performance and play our part in the national, cross-party effort to plan the future of the Welsh language?

I look forward to encouraging and contributing to this discussion over the coming period.



Adam Price 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.

This year, the Official Languages team has focused on capacity planning by beginning the process of reviewing the language plans of individual service areas with Heads of Service and Co-ordinators. Following the implementation of the recommendations of the last internal audit, reviewing and updating service language plans has become part of the Senedd Commission's assurance process. Heads of Service state in their annual assurance statement that they review and update their plans as required, and make use of them when planning capacity. The levels of assurance provided are reflected in the assurance statements of the Directors and the Chief Executive. This ensures that any recommendations or weaknesses identified during the process are recorded, and actions are identified.

Service Standards

Senedd business

Members of the Senedd can prepare for committee meetings in their preferred language. Individual committees' integrated teams prepare briefing documents in accordance with the wishes of committee members. All documents prepared for committee proceedings are bilingual, and Members can choose to contribute and hold discussions in their preferred language. Members who receive support from the Official Languages Team can arrange sessions to prepare for proceedings. This may include practice for delivering a 90 second statement, asking a question in plenary, or questioning a witness in a committee meeting. The Official Languages Team also offers short sessions and guidance on chairing meetings or simple phrases to use in meetings.

Internal communications

During the last year, the internal communications teams have been actively reviewing and updating communications strategies. A comprehensive review of the internal communications strategy was carried out, with the aim of ensuring that all Commission staff, regardless of their work pattern and location, receive information in a timely manner and in a suitable format. This included agreeing a corporate style, establishing a communications planning grid and a rapid communications process. In accordance with the Official Languages Scheme service standards, each element of the strategy includes provision for ensuring that all our corporate messages are published bilingually concurrently. This includes the rapid communication process that conveys messages urgently to all staff. The Commission also makes use of 'Viva Engage' on the staff intranet. The original messages are posted bilingually, and individual members of staff may respond in their preferred official language using the translation facility to obtain a rough translation of the response.

The Member Learning and Engagement Team has also reviewed its processes in terms of communications with Members and their support staff. The purpose of the review was to enable Members and their support staff to find answers to their queries more quickly, and to ease and create a more intuitive navigation process for them in using the Members' intranet. It was decided to create a standard structure for landing pages, focusing on offering quick access to the services that we offer them. The result of the review is to create a highly informative and reliable bilingual information hub where Members and their support staff can find

answers to questions and further support without having to make inquiries or wait for responses to those inquiries.

Procurement and partnership working

Use of the non-functional requirements drawn up for projects to procure systems or software is now well established. When teams gather their requirements for a project, bilingualism is an integral part of their consideration. Project managers and business analysts include the requirements by default as part of any eligible project. The requirements are adjusted according to the type of project to ensure that we succeed in procuring what works best for users and the organisation. A member of the Official Languages Team is also responsible for assessing the responses to the requirements in any tenders submitted.

Duties of Members of the Senedd

The Member Learning and Engagement Team regularly reviews its training programme for Members and their support staff. In conjunction with the Members' Business Support Team, a series of 'Power Hour or Half Hour' sessions were put together. The aim of the sessions is to present the fundamentals of a subject to Members or their support staff in half an hour. Members can choose to participate in Welsh or English sessions. In addition to the live sessions, some sessions have also been adapted to shorter videos in Welsh and English to be published on the Members' Intranet. The content of the sessions varies from creating publications and filling in forms for claiming allowances, to issues such as standards of conduct. Depending on the subject of the training, any duties that are part of the Official Languages Scheme service standards are included as part of the video. Members of staff from the Members' Business Support and Member Learning and Engagement teams lead the sessions and voice the videos in both languages. This means that Members and their Support Staff can take advantage of staff expertise in their preferred language either live, or at a time that suits them.

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, and to hear from organisations sharing their experiences too. An important part of our organisation's ethos is to celebrate our successes by discussing our experiences and sharing lessons learned since the Official Languages Act came into force. Our aim is to continue with this work and seek new opportunities to do so. This year, the Official Languages team was pleased to play a prominent part in a Colloquium on Bilingual Parliaments in July 2023 organised by the Rannóg ân Aistriúcháin (Translation and Bilingual Services) of the Oireachtas. The team gave presentations on legislation, Member services, recruitment, training, public engagement, and awareness and normalisation. The relationship between the Official Languages team and the Rannóg ân Aistriúcháin team continues.

Similarly, we are keen to learn from others and we had the opportunity to do so this year by joining the Language Matters roadshow, held jointly between the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Centre for Digital Public Services. There were sessions on changing behaviour, promoting Welsh language services, bilingual drafting and an opportunity to share successes.

Skills Strategy

This year, a survey of Welsh language skills was carried out in order to gather information about skills across all Senedd Commission staff. The information was gathered through an electronic form, using the skills matrix to describe the levels. The information is essential for planning the capacity of individual services, as well as the Senedd Commission in general. As we move towards the second half of the Sixth Senedd, the information will be used to plan for the Seventh Senedd, including any changes brought about by Senedd Reform. Bilingual working is part of any considerations and preparations for the Seventh Senedd. The Director of Communications and Engagement, representatives from the Official Languages Team or the Translation and Reporting Service will be members of the relevant project and planning boards. Over the next year, the task of reviewing individual services' language schemes will continue, incorporating the results of the Welsh language skills survey, and preparing for the inclusion of any changes or additions to teams as a result of Senedd Reform.

The results of the Welsh language skills survey are heartening. There has been an increase in the percentage of respondents noting that they have Welsh Language skills. There has been no change in the number of people who have self assessed at level 4 or 5, but there is an increase in the number noting that they have level 1

-3 skills. The percentage at courtesy level has increased by one point, and only 4% noted that they have no Welsh Language skills at all. Respondents were asked to self assess their skills in relation to the Senedd Commission’s Welsh Language skills matrix, and responses for speaking skills have been used for the purposes of this report. Further analysis will be undertaken later in the year.

Results of the Welsh Language skills survey

Skills level	2019	2024
Level 4-5	43%	43%
Level 1-3	25%	30%
Courtesy Level	22%	23%
Level 0	10%	4%



I have really enjoyed picking up Welsh lessons again since joining the Senedd Commission.

I've found this has brought real benefits, not just for my professional development, but also the social and wellbeing advantages of doing something outside of the day job, meeting different people and building confidence in a new skill.

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

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
2021-22	47	32	0	15
2022-23	51	34	0	17
2023-24	34	24		10

Internal

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2021-22	20	9	0	11
2022-23	19	13	0	6
2023-24	27	20		7

Total

	Posts advertised	Courtesy level	Combination of skills*	Level 1-5
2021-22	67	41	0	26
2022-23	70	47	0	23
2023-24	61	44		17

Percentages

	Courtesy level posts	Level 1 - 5 posts
2021-22	61%	39%
2022-23	67%	33%
2023-24	72%	28%

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.



An additional benefit of my lessons at the Senedd Commission is the great people I have met from different services – some I would never normally work with day to day.

It’s really helped me to learn about their work and, through the medium of Welsh, make new friends.

Senedd business

Table 2: Documents published by Senedd Committees in Welsh and English, and bilingually for the year 2023-24.

Type of document	Welsh	English	Bilingual
Internally prepared		34	1,148
Secretary of State		33	4
Welsh Government		56	1,143
Individual Members		11	18
External	5	528	319

Senedd Committees draft all documents to be published on the Senedd website in both languages. In accordance with the requirements of the Official Languages Scheme, letters and documents for individuals or organisations that have stated a preferred language will be drafted in that language only. Our approach to monitoring this data has changed. We now record whether the documents are published concurrently, and include all documents drafted for Committee meetings. It is for individual committees to decide in which format to receive documents for consideration in private committee sessions (e.g. draft reports), and Members' briefings. This includes the language used in those documents. Committee support staff speak to Members to understand their ways of working, and to ensure that they are able to prepare for meetings and take part in proceedings in a timely manner, and in their preferred official language.

Table 3: Number of documents laid in Welsh and English, and bilingually.

Year	Number of documents laid	Number of documents not laid bilingually	Percentage
2021-22	930	69	7%
2022-23	885	47	5%
2023-24	777	39	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 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 Senedd Commission or Welsh Government are required to lay before the Senedd;
- Explanatory Memoranda;
- Subordinate legislation;
- Statutory Instrument Consent Memoranda.

The Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee has been seeking to address a long-standing issue which involves some types of subordinate legislation being laid in the Senedd in English only.

Where some types of subordinate legislation are required to be laid in both the Senedd and the UK Parliament, the Welsh Government believes that – as no routine parliamentary procedures exist in Westminster for the laying of bilingual statutory instruments – they must be laid in the Senedd in English only.

The Committee and its predecessors has brought such instances to the attention of the Senedd. However, in autumn 2023 it decided to ask committees in the UK Parliament for their views on the procedural barriers described by the Welsh Government.

In January 2024, the procedures committees of both Houses of Parliament responded to the Committee, saying that no procedures prevent the laying of bilingual instruments in either House. The Committee subsequently passed on this information to the Welsh Government’s Counsel General.

Table 4: Business laid in the Table Office

Year	Oral Questions	Written Questions	Motions	Amendments	Statements of Opinion	Topical Questions
2021-22 (Welsh)	14%	4%	2%	4%	10%	18%
2021-22 (Bilingual)	0	0	11%	11%	3%	0
2022-23 (Welsh)	15%	3%	2%	0	6%	10%
2022-23 (Bilingual)	0	0	51%	32%	2%	0
2023-24 (Welsh)	9%	1%	3%	11%	4%	6%
2023-24 (Bilingual)	1%	0	55%	31%	2%	0

Individual Members may table business in their preferred language. Training is available for Members and support staff who wish to improve their written Welsh skills, and we will actively promote the training further to ensure that they are confident in using their skills when tabling business.

Proceedings

Table 5: Percentage of Welsh language contributions in Plenary proceedings and Committee meetings.

Type of contribution	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2021-22	Percentage of Welsh language contributions 2022-23	Percentage of contributions in Welsh 2023-24
Plenary proceedings	30%	30%	28%
Committee proceedings	12%	8%	9%

The percentage of Welsh contributions in Plenary this year has decreased slightly, and over the next year we will continue to provide services to Members in order to try to restore or increase the level. However, a small increase was seen in the percentage of Welsh contributions in Committee meetings. Support is available to Members in their preferred official language when preparing for plenary and committee proceedings, including briefing documents. 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, the figures are a cause for concern. We will continue with our efforts to ensure that Members and others that take part in proceedings are aware of their right to use their preferred language in those proceedings, and are confident in doing so. We will continue to provide services such as bespoke training for Members who are learning Welsh, bilingual briefing documents and glossaries, and will also engage with Members, Support Staff and group Staff to discuss the matter. Our aim will be to better understand the reasons for the decrease in Welsh language contributions, and to discuss what support would encourage them to use their Welsh language skills in proceedings.

Themes

Language Skills

The Official Languages Team regularly reviews and expands our Welsh learning provision. There is an opportunity for Official Languages Co-ordinators to raise any issues relating to the provision available for Senedd Commission staff at the Co-ordinators' Forum meeting, and individual members of staff can contact the team directly via e-mail or face to face. Line managers discuss training needs, including Welsh language skills, as part of the Performance and Development Review conversations. Members and their support staff are informed of any specific training via the Members' Intranet, and they can contact the Official Languages Team

The Welsh tutors regularly develop courses and resources tailored to individuals in collaboration with the individuals and/or their line managers. This year, the team has piloted several new provisions, including:

- Intensive provision for an individual Member over the summer recess;
- Additional sessions alongside the usual lessons to assist a member of Commission staff to apply their skills to their role;
- A series of intensive lessons over a period of one week for Mynediad (Entry) level learners;
- A booklet of phrases to use in committee meetings and an audio recording of those phrases.

The team holds regular coffee mornings and afternoon tea sessions for learners to meet and practice their skills. Learners can choose to be put in contact with a mentor who is a fluent Welsh speaker to practice their skills outside the classroom. Many learners feel that the provision gives them the opportunity not only to invest in their own personal development, but also to form relationships with colleagues outside of their immediate team. Learners benefit from the change in emphasis that lessons or practice sessions provide, and they also note a positive impact on wellbeing and mental health.

Recruitment

The Coronavirus pandemic has affected the way in which people applying for Courtesy-level posts are assessed. There was a strong feeling that an online assessment was not working at the Courtesy level. It was decided to only assess the successful candidate, as part of their probation period in post. Ways of working have also changed, with most people working flexibly between their homes and the Senedd offices. In order to ensure that we address these changes, a new Courtesy module has been developed, which was trialled recently. The module is available to any Commission staff member but will be mandatory for those appointed to a Courtesy-level post. The pilot scheme was successful, with many of the individuals who received training opting to continue to develop their skills by joining a Welsh class at the Senedd. The training is also available to Members of the Senedd and support staff, but they are not required to complete the module as part of their probation period.

Undertaking the Welsh language skills survey was a unique opportunity to trial changes to the definitions used for the Welsh language skill levels set out in the language skills matrix. Last year, feedback was provided from several sources that individuals are having difficulty determining their skill level using the definitions in the matrix. The team has simplified the descriptions, and has added a section to help new and fluent speakers identify their level using the titles of Learning Welsh courses, and those used in education in Wales. The team will be discussing the definitions further with others to ensure that they are appropriate before introducing the final changes to be fully implemented.



Learning Welsh can give a sense of belonging, bring more meaning into living in Wales, allow cultural emersion and have a range of well-being benefits.

Ever since the Covid pandemic, there has been a lot less casual interaction between colleagues, both in person and online, and Welsh classes seem to fill that void even better than before.

The organisation's bilingual ethos

Awareness

Many of the events for significant occasions are now embedded in the Senedd Commission calendar. The Official Languages team has organised events or created online resources and content for Shwmae – Su'mae Day, Saint Dwynwen's Day, St David's Day, Time to Talk Day and the Welsh Language Commissioner's Welsh Language Rights Day. The events are an opportunity to engage with Members and their Staff, as well as Commission Staff. Also throughout the year the team has developed a series of greeting cards to be distributed on significant occasions such as Christmas, St David's Day etc. The cards contain vocabulary and phrases to be spoken or used in writing in connection with the specific occasion. The Christmas themed cards were displayed on Tŷ Hywel canteen tables in collaboration with the catering team.

In addition, this year, an event was organised for Members, support staff and Commission staff, namely the Senedd Eisteddfod. The Eisteddfod was a bilingual event celebrating various talents. There were Welsh and English poetry competitions, photography, art and craft and competitions at all levels for Welsh learners. The winners were announced at an event in the Senedd, with an opportunity to also join online. Following a highly successful event, the intention is to hold the Eisteddfod again with additional competitions.

Since the establishment of the Procedures and Parliamentary Skills Service, the team has established an induction plan for new starters within the Clerking Services. The plan includes sessions on core subjects, ranging from the Chamber team's work to legislation, committees, the budget, petitions, and implementing the Official Languages Scheme. The sessions build on the information provided in the corporate induction sessions and are available for new or existing staff that wish to update their knowledge. These are presented by the services' Official Languages Co-ordinators, and information is provided about how the Official Languages Scheme is relevant to their everyday work in terms of Senedd business. The content covers issues such as publishing agendas, papers and reports, holding committee meetings, Plenary, and communication with Members and stakeholders.

Nadolig Llawen
Merry Christmas



 |  **Dysgwr**

Dydd S
Saint D

 |  **Dysgwr**

Monitoring and Compliance

No formal complaints were received about our provision this year. Further work has been done on ensuring that emerging issues in terms of compliance with the Official Languages Scheme are quickly identified.

The team has developed and presented guidance for the Official Languages Co-ordinators. The purpose of the guidance is to assist Co-ordinators in identifying emerging issues and to differentiate between examples of failing to comply with the scheme and formal complaints, and to take appropriate action. It is important to have a procedure in place to ensure that we can record and share actions taken and lessons learned to avoid the same thing happening again. Identifying issues as quickly as possible means that they can be resolved quickly, avoiding complaints from Members or the public.

The Senedd Commission has noted the points made by the Standards of Conduct Committee regarding language of choice and translation in its Ninth Report to the Sixth Senedd under Standing Order 22.9. Arrangements are in place for the Standards Commissioner to make use of the Commission's text translation and interpretation services as required and the Official Languages team advise on bilingual working also. The Commissioner's office has started the process of ascertaining language preferences for Members of the Senedd.

However, we have failed to reach the high standards set in the Scheme, or have failed to meet the expectations of our service users at times this year. Those instances relate to three areas:

The Commission Staff Intranet.

During a period of revamping specific pages on the staff intranet, those pages were published by mistake, before all of the content was available bilingually. The pages were still in draft form at the time and were subject to testing to ensure that they were fit for purpose. When the error came to light, actions were taken to ensure that all of the pages were published in both languages as soon as possible. The Co-ordinator discussed the issue with the team, who was already aware of the need to comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Scheme. The team has ensured that processes for creating pages in the future include the need to check that pages are available bilingually before they are published.

An all staff message

All Senedd Commission staff needed to be contacted to convey a message about an issue that everyone would need to take action on fairly soon. The email was sent before the text was available bilingually. The issue was raised with the service Co-ordinator and was discussed with the relevant individual and team. The need to ensure that all staff e-mails are bilingual before they are sent was reinforced, and there was a discussion of the processes in place to request quick translations at such times. The task of producing and launching the internal communications strategy this year has also helped to emphasise the quick communication process.

Correspondence and preferred language.

Correspondence was sent to an individual regarding several confidential matters. In response to the correspondence, the individual stated that they had not received the correspondence in their preferred language. The team sent an apology to the individual and gave assurance that any further correspondence would be sent in the individual's preferred language. After the issues in the correspondence had been resolved, the Official Languages Team advised the team on processes and procedures for such cases. The individual was also given assurance that actions had been taken so that this wouldn't happen again.

We always welcome feedback on our work. This year, Members and their Support Staff were surveyed to gather their views on the Commission's services. The ability to work in their preferred language is one of the areas covered in the survey. Once again this year, we received very positive feedback, with a high score from Members and Support Staff. The team set about addressing any points raised or recommendations made about the services. The team also received several nominations this year, with one of the Welsh Tutors nominated for the National Centre for Learning Welsh 'Tlws y Tiwtor' tutor award for 2023. Two of our Welsh Tutors also received nominations for the Senedd Commission's Recognition Scheme Passion award, and two learners won the award for their dedication to learning Welsh.



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

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