

WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME PROGRESS REPORT

April 2020 - March 2021

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Introduction

Qualifications Wales is a bilingual organisation that communicates through both Welsh and English.

In 2011, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure was introduced, making Welsh an official language in Wales and introducing a set of legally binding requirements known as the Welsh Language Standards. The Measure introduced the principle that Welsh must be treated no less favourably than English.

No statutory requirements have yet been applied to Qualifications Wales, although we expect to be included in the Welsh Language Standards in time.

Qualifications Wales embraces its responsibilities as a public sector body. Although not yet expected to meet the Welsh Language Standards, we have confirmed our commitment to developing and implementing a Welsh Language Scheme (the Scheme) on a voluntary basis.

The current Scheme was introduced in 2019. The Scheme sets out how Qualifications Wales will deliver Welsh language services as part of its day-to-day operations.

The legislation that created Qualifications Wales requires us to have regard to 'eight matters' in considering how the organisation delivers its functions. One of these 'matters' states 'the desirability of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language'.

We were already delivering many of the commitments included in the Scheme prior to April 2019. However, the Scheme aims to create ongoing focus to achieve further improvements in the delivery of a bilingual workplace and Welsh-language provision throughout our work.

This progress report aims to provide information on what has already been achieved and is now embedded into working practices within the organisation, along with providing information on what the organisation aims to achieve in the forthcoming reporting period.

Discussions had been held with the Welsh Language Commissioner's office prior to publishing the Scheme and a copy was provided to them. Although the Commissioner was anticipating that the Standards might be applied to Qualifications Wales in 2020, they welcomed publication of the Scheme as an interim measure. All update reports are also provided to the Commissioner's office.

Statement of Commitment

In line with the Welsh Language Act 1993, Qualifications Wales has adopted the principle that in the conduct of its public business and communication in Wales, it will treat the English and Welsh languages on an equal basis.

Qualifications Wales will be required to comply with Welsh Language Standards (no.2) Regulations 2016 in due course. Until that time, the Board and Executive of Qualifications Wales have decided to indicate their commitment to the Welsh language by voluntarily producing and publishing a Scheme. This Scheme sets out how Qualifications Wales will give effect to the principle of equality when delivering our functions and communicating with the public in Wales.

In this Scheme, the term 'public' means our audiences and stakeholders. It includes the public as a whole, as well as individual members of the public. The term also includes awarding bodies, voluntary organisations, charities and our stakeholders in the education sector, in local and national government.

The Scheme carries the full authority, support and approval of the Board and Executive of Qualifications Wales.

Overview of the Scheme

The Scheme sets out how the organisation conducts its business. This includes existing operational approaches as well as areas that the organisation wishes to improve and develop over time. It identifies the steps the organisation has already taken to deliver on its Welsh-language commitments.

Specifically, it:

- articulates everything that we will do or make available in the Welsh and English languages
- sets out a monitoring framework for the Scheme
- provides guidance to staff about how we work with the Welsh language

Recognising our role as a public regulator exercising statutory functions, our Scheme describes the steps we will take to encourage, enable, facilitate and support the use of Welsh in the delivery of our functions.

The Scheme

The Scheme has four elements (or 'areas of focus'), as set out in the Welsh Language Commissioner's guidelines. These follow the key headings of the Welsh Language Standards (no.2) Regulations 2016, which we expect to be asked to comply with in due course. These include:

- service delivery
- policy-making
- internal operations
- administering and monitoring the Scheme

Some of the four areas cut across the organisation. Some are the responsibility of specific teams within Qualifications Wales. The overall Scheme is owned by the Board of Qualifications Wales, which, together with the Executive, takes responsibility for ensuring we deliver on our commitments, and seeks to make improvements where possible and appropriate.

Service Delivery – the Public Interface

Corporate Identity

Qualifications Wales' name, address and logo are all bilingual. They form the core of our corporate identity and are used in all our publications, electronic communications, forms, presentations, exhibition materials, marketing and any other materials in the public domain.

We recognise it is important that our corporate identity is accessible to all. We continue to protect, promote and monitor the use of our corporate identity in both languages, and ensure that staff are aware of guidelines and the requirements within the Scheme.

Written Correspondence

In dealing with correspondence in Welsh, whether by letter or email, we respond in Welsh. All formal corporate correspondence issued by our Communications or Corporate Governance Teams is issued in both Welsh and English.

During the reporting period, work began on the recording of individuals' language preferences on our customer relationship management (CRM) database, which is used to record our stakeholder details and interactions, including targeted mailings.

The aim is to record preferences for written and spoken communication in Welsh, English or either language, to allow us to record, and therefore generate, individual preferences as and when required.

Before commencing the work on language preferences in 2020-21 we discussed our approach with the Welsh Language Commissioner.

As part of the work undertaken on language preferences of our stakeholders/customers, we delivered two workshops for staff, to brief them on how to collect this information and enter it onto the customer relationship database. We have also added an automated form so that our stakeholders/customers can update their records.

Telephone Calls

Telephone callers using our published numbers are greeted in Welsh and English and our out-of-hours service offers Welsh and English information options.

Visitors to our Reception

During the reporting year, staff have been working at home due to the global pandemic, therefore the office has been closed to visitors and all meetings have taken place online. Where required, meetings have taken place in Welsh or bilingually.

In normal times, visitors to the office will see a sign inviting them to converse in Welsh, if that is their preferred language choice. Visitors can expect a Welsh-speaking member of staff to be available to assist them.

In order to achieve our service delivery targets for both telephone calls and visitors, colleagues who undertake reception duties receive induction in this area of work and are fully briefed on all processes. The Facilities/Reception Desk Instruction Manual is reviewed regularly and is kept at hand for colleagues covering the reception function.

A list of all bilingual members of staff is located on reception to facilitate dealing with phone callers and visitors wishing to use the Welsh language.

Public Meetings and Events

In normal working circumstances, public meetings convened by the organisation are always advertised and promoted bilingually, with invitations sent in both Welsh and English. We also encourage participation in Welsh at events.

During the global pandemic, a technical system was set up to ensure bilingual online meetings could take place.

We ensure the staff who are attending events (in person or online) are fully briefed and that Welsh-speaking employees make themselves easily identifiable.

When we publish reports or minutes of events we have run, we make these available in Welsh and English.

Publicity, Publications and Public Notices

All Qualifications Wales publicity, publications and public notices are provided simultaneously in Welsh and English. Resource materials to support our work are also produced bilingually.

Exceptions to this would only be where a report is not intended for the general public or has very limited readership. On occasion, documents produced by other organisations that are only available in English are published on our website if we consider these to be of interest or useful to our stakeholders.

We published 58 publications/reports during 2020-21, all of which were bilingual. These included regulation and research reports, and also statistical information.

Materials we make available at public events and press notices are published simultaneously in Welsh and English.

Social Media

Social media messages are published and responded to in Welsh and English. Over the reporting period, all 560 messages were published bilingually.

Website

The Qualifications Wales website is fully bilingual, with Welsh and English pages. Clear directions are provided to enable viewers to switch from one language to the other.

We monitor our website and seek feedback – implementing improvements and changes where appropriate.

Translation Services

We use high-quality translation services to ensure that text and documents are translated into Welsh accurately and reflect our style and the Qualifications Wales 'tone of voice'.

Policy-making – Corporate and Regulatory

Corporate Policies

When approving a new policy or reviewing our existing policies, we always consider how a policy decision could affect the opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.

Our Equality Objectives include reference to our Welsh Language Scheme, ensuring that we continually improve how we operate as an inclusive organisation. As part of our Equality Objectives we monitor the equal treatment of the Welsh and English languages.

Our policy aims and objectives are communicated to our staff through our induction process and regular internal communication mechanisms.

Regulatory Policy

Qualifications Wales' powers and duties as an independent regulator are defined in legislation which confirms the matters that we should pay regard to. One of the 'eight matters' that we pay regard to is 'the desirability of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language'.

Our *Choice for All* (Welsh-medium strategy) was published in July 2020. This sits alongside our Welsh Language Scheme and sets out how we will work with our stakeholders to increase the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications between 2020 and 2025.

The strategy comprises of four strategic areas of focus. The four strategic areas of focus are:

- identify and prioritise qualifications to be made available in Welsh
- strengthen capacity in the qualification system
- revise our Welsh-language support grant
- improve information and data on Welsh-medium qualifications

Welsh-language Grants

During 2020, our Welsh-language grant documentation was refocused to include the priority areas identified in the *Choice for All* strategy and to encourage applications for new qualifications, and those qualifications being updated. The competitive grant process was very successful with high interest from awarding bodies; over £304k was awarded via 15 grants to seven awarding bodies whose applications met the four criteria areas of:

- demand
- sustainability
- quality assurance
- alignment to Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales' policies and strategies

This year, we are supporting qualifications in a variety of subjects including sport and leisure, engineering, essential skills, agriculture, business, hairdressing, play work and religious education.

We have continued to ensure that we are consistent in our approach to awarding grants and that the requirements of the Scheme are included in the process.

Research

When commissioning research we ensure our research ethics actively consider any potential impact on the Welsh language.

We have built the requirements of the Scheme into research briefs and contracts as appropriate.

We continue to seek to engage Welsh speakers and encourage contributions in the Welsh language when we undertake consultations in relation to our regulatory functions. Our regulatory documents are available in Welsh and English.

We continue to monitor engagement with Welsh speakers in any consultation processes to ensure representation and engagement.

Below are two examples of the surveys/consultations that took place during the reporting period:

Public Confidence Survey

During September/October we undertook a Public Confidence Survey.
1,000 people were interviewed online, of which two chose to answer in Welsh.
An additional 1,000 people were interviewed in person, of which 22 chose to undertake the interview in Welsh.

Skilled for the Future – consultation on the Advanced Skills Challenge Certificate and the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate framework

This consultation was undertaken during the autumn of 2020.

Main consultation: 26 Welsh language – 183 English language respondents

Summary consultation: 11 Welsh language – 208 English language respondents

Internal Operations

Staff Recruitment

We continue to ensure that commitments made in our Scheme relating to the recruitment of staff are upheld. These include considering the Welsh-language requirements of a post, advertising posts bilingually and managing the recruitment process in either Welsh or English based on the applicant's choice.

We make it clear that applications submitted in Welsh are welcome and monitor the number of posts requiring Welsh-language skills. During the reporting year, we ran fifteen recruitment campaigns. All campaigns were promoted bilingually on our website, with additional Welsh-language portals utilised, e.g. Swyddle. We also use other Welsh-language sites, such as Golwg, Leolo and Safle Swyddi, based on the needs of the role being advertised.

HR Appointment and Employee Practices

We have always respected an employee's preference to engage in the Welsh language. Offer letters and employee contracts can be produced in Welsh if the appointable candidate has indicated that this is their preference at application stage. We have translated our core employee policies, with a commitment to translating the remainder at the point they are next reviewed. These policies state that some employee practices can also be carried out bilingually – for example, disciplinary, grievance and whistleblowing. Employees can also conduct their performance and development conversations in Welsh if the employee and line manager are happy to do so. During the last year, we have reinforced this position and we communicate our approach to employees through internal news items and training. We promote this approach at induction to ensure that employees are aware of the Welsh Language Scheme.

During the last year, we have also undertaken a procurement exercise and awarded a contract to deliver a bilingual HR system which will enable employees to book annual leave, record sickness absence, and update and manage their personal and equalities information and Welsh-language skills in Welsh or English. This is being implemented and will be delivered to employees during the summer of 2021. Once this aspect of the project has been completed, we will then implement an online recruitment module which will be bilingual.

We have added the Welsh Language Scheme into our new employee induction process so that employees understand our commitment and approach from the outset.

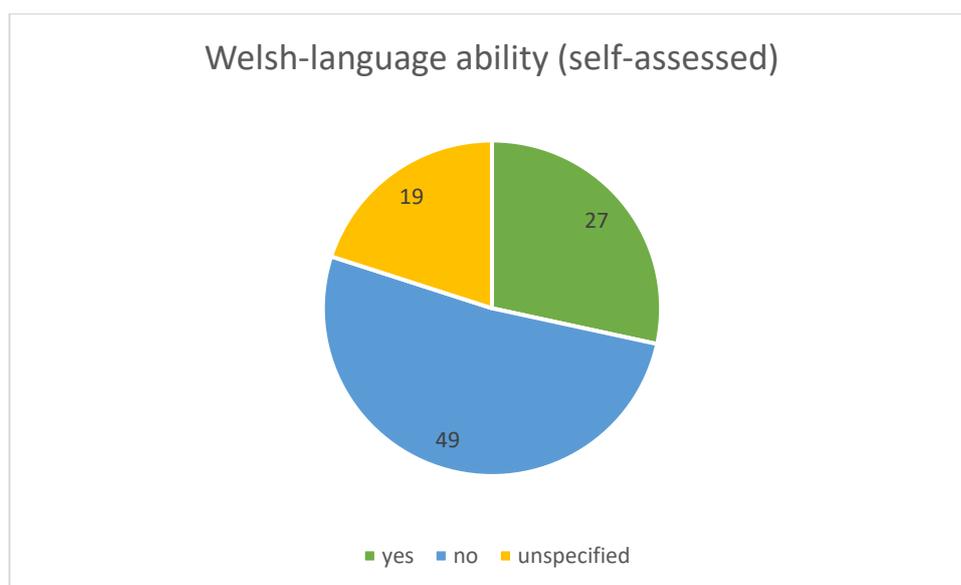
We took the opportunity, as part of the workshops held on the Welsh language preference work, to provide our employees with an update on the Welsh Language Scheme, including reminders on all information and functions currently available to them in the Welsh language.

Staff Welsh-Language Ability

We review the level of our employees' Welsh-language ability as part of our approach to the Welsh language and development of staff skills. Employees self-assess their ability and rate themselves on a scale of 1 (fluent) to 5 (no ability) against reading, speaking, understanding and writing.

As at 31 March 2021, 27 employees (28%) rated themselves as having Welsh-language skills (a decrease of four employees on last year), and 49 (52%) indicated that they did not (this figure remained the same as the previous year, a decrease of 4% of the total number of employees due to a rise in head count). Nineteen (20%) employees had not assessed their ability. Of those who indicated they did have some Welsh-language skills, 14 considered themselves fluent across all measures (general ability, speaking, understanding and writing). Some employees who declared no skills rated themselves as having some limited ability across one or some of the measures.

New employees are asked to review and confirm their skills upon joining. We also ask current employees to review their skills annually, acknowledging that those learning Welsh will improve their ability during their employment.



Training and Skills

We continue to support Welsh-language learning opportunities through funding staff members in personal study, as well as the promotion of the online learning modules developed by the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

During the last twelve months, we have not received any requests to support Welsh-language learning at classes. This is likely to be due to the pandemic, which has impacted face-to-face learning. We have continued to promote and encourage online learning methods.

We have previously supported employees to attend the residential sessions delivered by the National Centre for Learning Welsh, which immerses learners in the language to either build on existing language skills or start individuals on their Welsh-language journey. This has not been available during the last year due to the pandemic, but we will promote and provide support for employees to attend when these sessions resume.

When procuring training to deliver corporately across the organisation, we build the Welsh language into the requirements and seek to deliver either bilingually, or to deliver Welsh-language sessions. During the last year, we delivered training in giving and receiving feedback and the appointed provider was able to deliver in Welsh.

We have also worked with three other sponsored bodies to collaboratively procure and design two Leadership and Management programmes, one aimed at line managers, the other at leadership level. The first cohorts commenced in autumn 2020 and, whilst there has not yet been demand across the group of sponsored bodies for a Welsh language cohort for either programme, we are offering a Welsh cohort to commence in autumn 2021.

Information Technology

As detailed in the Scheme, our corporate identity within electronic communication is provided in both Welsh and English as standard.

We are trialling use of an online translation tool to enable quicker translation of non-technical communications.

Procurement and Contracts

We continue to ensure that all procurement and contract processes comply with our commitment in the Scheme.

We have appointed translators who are members of the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters.

We also continue to ensure that contractors are aware of our Scheme and our ongoing commitment to the Welsh language.

Forward Look

During 2021-22, we intend to further progress the following areas:

- Undertake a review of our Scheme against the Welsh Language Standards (Wales).
- Continue to develop the customer relationship management database to record our stakeholders' individual language preferences for both written and spoken communications.
- Deliver the employee 'self-service' module of our new HR system in English and Welsh so users can use the system in their preferred language and implement a bilingual recruitment module.
- Continue to enhance staff awareness of employment practices available through the Welsh language.
- Review opportunities available for senior managers and Board members to receive training about using the Welsh language in their role.
- Monitor the trial use of online translation tools to enable quicker translation of non-technical communications.
- Further enhance our monitoring process to monitor our compliance with our commitments in the Scheme across the operations of the organisation.

We will monitor delivery of these through our internal operational and team plans for 2021-22.

July 2021