

# The Official Languages Scheme: Draft for consultation

February 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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# **The Official Languages Scheme:** Draft for consultation

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## Foreword

I am pleased to present the Senedd Commission's Official Languages Scheme for the Sixth Senedd. This is the third Scheme since the Official Languages Act was passed in 2012. Significant changes have been made in the 10 years since the Act was passed. The ethos and the culture of the Senedd – and the way in which we provide bilingual services – have been completely transformed.

The Senedd is a fully bilingual organisation. Both official languages are treated equally and bilingual working is now the norm. The Coronavirus pandemic proved this to be true. The Senedd was one of the first legislatures on the international stage to move to virtual meetings whilst maintaining our usual high standards of bilingual working. From the very first virtual meeting, Members were able to participate in proceedings using the official language of their choice, with simultaneous translation available as usual on *Zoom*. Indeed, there has been an increase in the use of Welsh in the Senedd's proceedings as the Senedd has experimented with virtual and hybrid models of working; this is something to be built on. From the outset, the way in

which our meetings were organised and conducted was testament to the progress made, as was the mindset which has now become embedded. The question is always *how* we can provide a bilingual service, rather than *must* we provide a bilingual service, with the emphasis on bilingualism by default.

It is important, however, not to rest on our laurels and the main aim of this Scheme is to ensure that we maintain the highest possible standards, and that we respond in a positive manner to the expectations of those who engage with us. The layout of this Scheme differs from its predecessors in response to feedback received over the years. We have tried to create a clearer document that is easier to use. We

have combined the Scheme and the Bilingual Skills Strategy to create a single comprehensive document that makes it easier for our stakeholders to find information about our official languages. We have also made our service standards as clear as possible, to ensure that those who engage with the Senedd can clearly identify what is expected in terms of bilingual services.

To date, our work has focused on fulfilling our ambition to become a truly bilingual organisation. Along the way, we have benefited from the experiences and advice of organisations across Wales and beyond. We now feel that we can offer the same help and advice to others. The Senedd regularly engages with parliaments and legislatures around the world to help them establish, maintain and improve their democratic processes. Enabling individuals to participate in the democratic process – and to participate in the official language of their choice – is crucial to achieving true democracy. We will proactively seek ways to share our experiences and expertise by making use of our ties with organisations around the world, whilst still continuing to learn from others.

To achieve this, we rely on the dedication and support of Members of the Senedd and Senedd

Commission staff. We are proud of the fact that Members of the Senedd regularly scrutinise our work in this area, and hold us to account by providing constructive feedback on an ongoing basis. Senedd Commission staff enable us to implement the Scheme, to respond to feedback and to ensure that we maintain the highest possible standards. We value every member of our staff – regardless of how bilingual they are – for their professional and parliamentary commitment and expertise.

The Senedd serves a diverse and multicultural nation, and the people of Wales expect to see their Senedd set the highest possible standards across all its services. The Senedd Commission is committed to ensuring that we are an organisation that is open to all. We will ensure that we support everyone through our bilingual services and give them the confidence to express their identity, which includes making use of their language skills, regardless of the level of those skills.

**Rhun ap Iorwerth MS**  
**Commissioner**

# SERVICE STANDARDS

In accordance with the National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Act 2012, this Scheme establishes the following principles:

- The Official Languages of the Welsh Parliament (the Senedd) are English and Welsh.
- The official languages must, in the conduct of Senedd proceedings, be treated on a basis of equality.
- All persons have the right to use either official language when participating in Senedd proceedings.

On 6 May 2020 the National Assembly for Wales became the Welsh Parliament, commonly known as the Senedd.



## 1. Senedd business

- 1.1** All documents produced by the Senedd Commission relating to public business in Plenary and committee meetings must be available simultaneously in both official languages in accordance with Standing Order 15.4.
- 1.2** All Bills considered by the Senedd must be available in both official languages, apart from the exceptions outlined in Standing Order 26.5.
- 1.3** Internal and private papers for Plenary and committee meetings must be provided in the official language of individual Members' choice.
- 1.4** Other supporting papers provided by third parties are published in the language or languages in which they are submitted. The Senedd Commission will provide a translation of any papers submitted in Welsh to ensure that the content is available to all those who wish to read it.
- 1.5** When sending invitations to individuals or organisations to contribute to a public consultation, a committee must state that it welcomes receiving responses in either official language.
- 1.6** The Senedd Commission must provide a simultaneous interpretation service from Welsh to English during all Senedd proceedings, in accordance with Standing Orders 13.2 and 17.45, and during all public events arranged by the Senedd, whether they are held virtually or in person/face-to-face.
- 1.7** The simultaneous interpretation service during Senedd proceedings must be available to visitors to public galleries and committee rooms in the Senedd and Tŷ Hywel, across the Senedd estate and on any webcasting service.
- 1.8** In accordance with the National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Act 2012, the Record of Proceedings must include a record of what is said in Plenary in the official language spoken together with a full translation into the other official language.
- 1.9** Transcripts of committee proceedings must include a transcript of the simultaneous interpretation of Welsh contributions.

- 1.10** English and Welsh versions of agendas, minutes and supporting papers must be provided simultaneously for Senedd Commission meetings, in line with the wishes of individual Commissioners.
- 1.11** A simultaneous interpretation service from Welsh to English must be provided for Senedd Commission meetings, in line with individual Commissioners' wishes.
- 1.12** Published reports and papers relating to Senedd Commission business must be issued simultaneously in both official languages.
- 1.13** The Senedd Commission secretariat must engage with Members of the Senedd, their support staff, Senedd Commission staff and the public in both official languages.
- 1.14** The Llywydd, as chair of the Commission, and individual Commissioners must respond to all communications concerning the Commission's work in the recipient's preferred language.
- 1.15** The Senedd Commission must provide a simultaneous interpretation service from Welsh to English for Cross Party Group meetings as required.
- 1.16** The Senedd Commission must provide for the translation of annual reports and minutes of Cross Party groups.

## 2. External communications

- 2.1** All correspondence (including e-mail, letters and messages on the website) sent for the first time to more than one recipient must be bilingual.
- 2.2** The Senedd Commission must respond to any correspondence in the official language that was originally used unless the recipient has indicated otherwise.
- 2.3** The Senedd Commission must respond to any contact via social media in the official language that was originally used unless the recipient indicates otherwise.
- 2.4** Any correspondence following a meeting or telephone call must be sent in the language that was originally used unless the recipient indicates otherwise.
- 2.5** Callers to the corporate telephone lines must be offered a proactive choice of official language.
- 2.6** Telephone answering machine messages for our main switchboard and receptions must be bilingual.
- 2.7** Individual members of Senedd Commission staff should record bilingual messages on their telephone answering machines.
- 2.8** Senedd Commission staff should answer telephone calls with a bilingual greeting. The Senedd Commission must ensure that appropriate resources and training are available to facilitate this.
- 2.9** When answering a call from an individual who wishes to speak Welsh, members of staff who are not confident to continue the conversation in Welsh must explain and offer to transfer the call to a colleague who is confident to deal with the call in Welsh.
- 2.10** Information to the media en masse must be issued bilingually. When responding to individual requests, certain items will be provided in the preferred official language.
- 2.11** If separate English and Welsh versions of materials or content need to be created, they must be made available simultaneously. When such separate versions are provided, they must be equal in quality, size and prominence.

- 2.12** All content produced by the Senedd Commission for the Senedd website must be bilingual. Third party documents, or documents published for information that were produced in a third party's preferred language, are published in that language only.
- 2.13** The content of our social media feeds must be bilingual.
- 2.14** Online broadcasts of Senedd proceedings must be available in the original language, and with simultaneous interpretation from Welsh to English.
- 2.15** Any audio visual material produced by the Senedd Commission must be bilingual.

### **3. Internal communications**

- 3.1** Any text produced by the Senedd Commission for the staff intranet and Members' intranet must be bilingual.
- 3.2** The following must be bilingual:
- electronic messages to all Members and/or their support staff;
  - electronic messages to all staff;
  - surveys aimed at Members and support staff;
  - Senedd Commission staff surveys;
  - hard or electronic copies of any information intended for general distribution.
- 3.3** Senedd Commission staff have the right to contribute to all staff meetings in either official language.
- 3.4** Senedd Commission staff can request a simultaneous interpretation service from Welsh to English at meetings or events on the Senedd estate relating to their role as a member of staff (e.g. team meetings, management board and leadership team meetings, project boards, working groups).
- 3.5** Individual members of Senedd Commission staff are entitled to request a text translation service for any matters relating to their employment and performance.

## 4. Engagement

- 4.1** Advertisements, publicity and campaign material, or other methods of engagement employed by the Senedd Commission that target Members of the Senedd, their support staff or the public, must be bilingual. The text in both languages must be equal in size and design, and neither language is to be treated less favourably than the other.
- 4.2** Members of the public can expect to converse with public-facing Senedd Commission staff in either English or Welsh in those public places managed by the Senedd Commission.
- 4.3** The Senedd Commission must make arrangements to ensure that users of the estate can easily identify Welsh speakers and learners.
- 4.4** The Senedd's outreach services must be available bilingually, or in the recipient's preferred official language.
- 4.5** Educational visits and tours of the Senedd are available in either official language. Visitors will be offered a choice at the point of booking.
- 4.6** For all public meetings, seminars, events or exhibitions organised by the Senedd Commission, on or off the Senedd estate, we must:
- issue bilingual invitations and produce bilingual publicity material;
  - provide simultaneous interpretation from Welsh to English and inform prospective attendees of the availability of this service at the event;
  - provide bilingual versions of supporting papers and any subsequent reports;
  - ensure that bilingual Senedd Commission staff members are available at such meetings/events.

## 5. Culture and ethos

**Our corporate identity is bilingual. However, on occasion, the same term or name is used in both official languages, including the following: Llywydd, Senedd, Neuadd, Cwrt, Oriel, Siambr, Tŷ Hywel, Siambr Hywel, Pierhead.**

- 5.1** The Commission must make arrangements to ensure that Welsh speakers and learners can be easily identified by anyone engaging with the Senedd.
- 5.2** All audio announcements on the estate, including in the lifts, must be bilingual.
- 5.3** The automatic e-mail signatures and out-of-office messages of Senedd Commission staff are bilingual. Templates are available to ensure that the English and Welsh texts are equal in quality, format and size.
- 5.4** Senedd Commission staff, Members of the Senedd and their support staff must be given the option of e-mail addresses in either official language: **xxxx.xxxx@Senedd.Wales** and **xxxx.xxxx@Senedd.Cymru**.
- 5.5** The Senedd Commission must ensure that Members, support staff and Senedd Commission staff are able to use interfaces in either official language where available.
- 5.6** The Senedd Commission must provide spellchecking software in both official languages for all Senedd ICT accounts.
- 5.7** Any software or apps developed by the Senedd Commission must be bilingual.
- 5.8** When procuring software for the Senedd Commission, the official language needs of users and the organisation must be considered and met as part of the process.
- 5.9** Any software used by the Senedd Commission to provide services for Members and their staff, or to the public, must be bilingual.

## 6. Events on the Senedd estate

- 6.1** When holding events on the Senedd estate, organisations must issue bilingual invitations in the name of the Member of the Senedd sponsoring the event.
- 6.2** The Senedd Commission must offer a simultaneous interpretation service to any external organisations holding events on the Senedd estate.
- 6.3** The Senedd events team must discuss the requirement for bilingual invitations and any simultaneous interpretation requirements with event organisers in the course of organising an event.

## 7. Procurement and partnership working

- 7.1** When the Senedd Commission operates as the strategic and financial leader within a formal partnership, the public service elements of that partnership must comply with this Scheme.
- 7.2** When the Senedd Commission joins a formal partnership that is led by others or a consortium, the Commission's contribution must comply with this Scheme.
- 7.3** The Senedd Commission must provide legal agreements with individuals, organisations or groups in the partner's preferred official language.
- 7.4** Any contracts between the Senedd Commission and third parties (such as recruitment agencies, catering companies, consultants, contractors etc.) for the provision of services to Members of the Senedd, their support staff and the public, must specify the parts of this Scheme with which they are required to comply.
- 7.5** The Senedd Commission must ensure that all our contractors are provided with information on the principles of working bilingually under this Scheme.
- 7.6** The Senedd Commission must work with successful contractors to help them implement those parts of the Scheme with which they must comply.
- 7.7** The Senedd Commission must ensure that invitations to tender are sent in the supplier's preferred language.
- 7.8** Potential suppliers or contractors have the right to submit a tender in their preferred official language.

## 8. Policy making

- 8.1** In developing new services for Members of the Senedd and their support staff or the public, both official languages must be treated equally. New services will be bilingual from the outset.
- 8.2** In developing new policies, the Senedd Commission must bear the principles of this Scheme in mind in terms of the right to use either official language and the principle of treating both languages equally.

## 9. Information requests

- 9.1** When responding to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, or subject access requests under the UK General Data Protection Regulation, we will correspond with those making the requests in their preferred official language. In accordance with the relevant legislation and good practice, if the information is only held in one language, it will be provided in that language (however a translation is provided if the document consists of fewer than 100 words, in accordance with the **Code of Practice on Public Access to Information**).

## 10. Duties of Members of the Senedd

- 10.1** Any materials (including headed paper, business cards, surgery notices, reports and websites) that are funded by the Senedd Commission or the Remuneration Board must be produced bilingually.

## 11. Monitoring, reporting and dealing with complaints

- 11.1** The Senedd Commission must nominate an officer with day-to-day responsibility for co-ordinating the development and implementation of the Official Languages Scheme, and for monitoring compliance with the Scheme.
- 11.2** Each service must nominate an Official Languages co-ordinator to assist with relevant aspects of implementing the scheme and monitoring compliance. The co-ordinators will be members of the Scheme Co-ordinators Forum that meets regularly to discuss matters regarding the implementation of the Scheme.
- 11.3** The Senedd Commission must, in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Government of Wales Act 2006, prepare an annual report in relation to the previous financial year, which outlines how the Scheme has been implemented including the following statistical information:
- the number of posts advertised and the level of Welsh language skills required;
  - the percentage of business carried out in Welsh per item;
  - the number of documents laid in Welsh and English, and the number laid bilingually;
  - the percentage of Welsh language contributions in Plenary proceedings and Committee meetings;
  - the number and nature of complaints received about the Commission's provision of bilingual services.
- 11.4** The Senedd Commission must lay the annual report before the Senedd, giving Members of the Senedd the opportunity to note the report and scrutinise the Commission's work in relation to bilingual services in an annual Plenary debate.
- 11.5** The Senedd Commission must make arrangements to investigate and report on any complaint received about the provision of bilingual services in accordance with the complaints process.
- 11.6** If the Senedd Commission does not meet the service standards outlined in this Scheme, a record will be kept, together with details of the steps taken to avoid a repeat of the situation in future.

## 12. Skills Strategy

**In accordance with the National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Act 2012, the Senedd Commission is required to set out its strategy for ensuring that staff have, collectively and across service areas, the language skills necessary to enable this Scheme to be implemented.**

- 12.1** The Senedd Commission must gather information on the Welsh language skills of Senedd Commission staff to provide assurance that staff have the necessary skills to provide bilingual services.
- 12.2** The Senedd Commission must report on the Welsh language skill levels of Senedd Commission staff across the organisation at least once every Senedd.
- 12.3** Each individual service must maintain and update a service language plan, which sets out how the service will provide bilingual services of the highest quality.
- 12.4** Service language plans must include details of the language requirements of each post in the service.
- 12.5** When seeking consent to advertise a vacancy or new post, teams must provide the Executive Board with an assurance as to their capacity to provide bilingual services and confirm the Welsh language skills required for the post in accordance with the details set out in the service language plan.
- 12.6** The Senedd Commission must use a language skills matrix, which describes skill levels in relation to the Welsh language, to measure the organisation's bilingual capacity. Such a matrix must also be used during the recruitment process.
- 12.7** The job specification for each advertised post must include the level of Welsh language skill required, with Courtesy-level Welsh set as the basic skill level for any post.
- 12.8** The Senedd Commission must provide Welsh language skills training for Members and their staff.
- 12.9** The Senedd Commission must provide training for any Senedd Commission staff member who wishes to learn Welsh or improve their

language skills, in order to ensure that our staff have the necessary skills to deliver outstanding bilingual services and the confidence to use them.

- 12.10** All new Senedd Commission staff must be informed of the requirements of this Scheme and the requirements with which they are expected to comply.
- 12.11** All new Senedd Commission staff must be informed of the support available to develop their language skills as they wish.
- 12.12** The Senedd Commission must provide awareness sessions on this Scheme for Members of the Senedd and their support staff as required.
- 12.13** In order to ensure consistency in the provision of bilingual services, the Senedd Commission must undertake regular work to maintain Senedd Commission staff awareness of the Scheme's requirements and what they are expected to do as individuals.

## Contact

**Feedback helps us to improve our performance and ensures that we remain at the forefront of providing and developing outstanding bilingual services.**

We can be contacted as follows:

Website: <https://senedd.wales/help/contact-us/>

Email: [contact@senedd.wales](mailto:contact@senedd.wales)

Telephone: **0300 200 6565**

Alternatively, we can be contacted via our social media accounts.

If we do not achieve the high standards outlined in this Scheme, complaints can be made through the Senedd Commission's complaints process. The Senedd complaints policy sets out the process for making complaints:

<https://senedd.wales/help/complaints/complaints-procedure/>

or [this form](#) can be used to make a complaint.



**THEMES FOR  
THE PERIOD  
OF THIS  
SCHEME**



## **Procurement**

It is essential that any element of our work provided or delivered by a third party complies with the Scheme's requirements as well as users' expectations.

We will:

- ensure that all procurement plans refer to the requirements of the Official Languages Scheme and take these requirements into account;
- create an awareness-raising package aimed at anyone considering submitting a tender as part of a procurement plan, explaining our ethos as a bilingual organisation and what is meant by default bilingual provision;
- compile and apply a standard set of non-functional requirements for use on any systems or software procurement projects that will ensure that the ability to work bilingually is an integral element of a successful bid.

## Language Skills

In order to provide outstanding bilingual services and maintain our reputation as a fully bilingual organisation, we need to ensure that our staff have the relevant skills.

We will:

- expand our Welsh language learning provision to include more courses and sessions tailored to specific teams, services or elements of the Senedd's work;
- expand our provision by developing online material for learners and Welsh speakers at all levels who wish to supplement their learning or are unable to learn in traditional classes;
- establish a Confidence Scheme for Welsh speakers who do not feel confident to use their skills as part of their work at the Senedd, providing tailored support to help them regain their confidence to use their Welsh language skills;
- undertake a Welsh language skills survey if this element cannot be incorporated into the HR system;
- Continue to offer a broad range of training to support Senedd Commission staff, Members of the Senedd and support staff who wish to improve their written English skills.

## **Recruitment**

The language skills matrix approach to determining and assessing skill levels for jobs, is now well established. Over the course of the Fifth Senedd, the Official Languages Team gathered comments and made minor adjustments to processes. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to change many of our recruitment methods and has offered an opportunity to rethink our language skills processes.

This approach led to change within the organisation. The results of the language skills survey carried out in 2019 show that Senedd Commission staff are starting to become more familiar with the descriptions used in the language skills matrix. Language skills are seen as an integral part of the authorisation process before advertising vacant posts. The recruitment authorisation process involves checking the post's designated skill level against the relevant service's language plan, and considering whether it remains appropriate or needs to be changed.

To ensure that we maintain Welsh language skills levels across the organisation, and to maintain our current bilingual ethos, it is appropriate that we review the system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

## **Courtesy-level Welsh**

We will:

- review the method of assessment and ensure that it is also suitable for virtual assessments;
- review the timing of the assessment within the recruitment process;
- review the Courtesy-level Welsh training module to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and includes more initial awareness training;
- review and update the Courtesy-level Welsh resources available to potential applicants on our website.

## **The Language Skills Matrix (levels 1-5)**

We will:

- review the definitions in the language skills matrix to ensure that they are suitable for our organisation, and that the differences between each level are clear;
- work with the Recruitment Team to create resources and materials to help applicants understand the skills levels and assessment process;
- review the assessment process for level 1-3 posts in order to create more standardised assessments that can be carried out virtually;
- develop and deliver training modules similar to the Courtesy-level Welsh training for levels 1-3;
- consider creating resources for candidates to help them decide whether their language skills match the designated level for any post.

## **The organisation's bilingual ethos**

The Senedd has a reputation as an organisation that operates bilingually and respects the individual's right to choose to use either official language, Welsh or English, as a default when engaging with us. However, it is important not to rest on our laurels, and we must continue to seek ways of maintaining the high standards expected by Members of the Senedd, their support staff and the people of Wales.

### **Awareness**

It is vital that we ensure that Senedd Commission staff are aware of the requirements of the Official Languages Scheme and of our organisation's bilingual culture. The work of our Official Languages Coordinators is essential in this regard.

We will:

- review the content of the induction course for new Senedd Commission staff; update the awareness-raising video for Senedd Commission staff to ensure that it is suitable for the Sixth Senedd;
- update and expand our intranet pages to include advice and support on working bilingually and the requirements of this Scheme;
- hold events on significant occasions e.g. Shwmae – Su'mae Day;
- regularly share messages about elements of the plan and best practice on the intranet.

## Supporting Members and their support staff

We will:

- review the content of the induction course for support staff;
- offer Members of the Senedd a briefing session on the Official Languages Scheme, setting out their responsibilities under the Scheme;
- regularly review and update the information available on the Members' intranet;
- offer all Members of the Senedd a dedicated 'Buddy' who will be able to advise on all aspects of bilingual working.

## Communication

Communication and engagement are important elements of our ethos as an organisation. We need to ensure that we always stand by the principles of this Scheme and respect the rights of Members of the Senedd, their support staff and the people of Wales in relation to our official languages.

We will:

- work with the Communications team to produce bilingual templates for the organisation's business, including PowerPoint presentations and publicity material;
- provide instructions and advice to Senedd Commission staff on bilingual communications;
- pilot and establish a system of recording the preferred official language of individuals who engage with us, and ensure that it complies with GDPR and data protection requirements;
- make use of any system introduced to record Members' official language of choice.

## **Use of Welsh language skills**

Our statistics on the use of Welsh in proceedings show an increase in the percentage of contributions since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. The experience of colleagues across Wales also reflects this. There are several possible reasons for this, including the fact that Welsh speakers and learners can feel more confident to use their skills when they contribute virtually, and the fact that those using a simultaneous translation service do not need to use headphones when they contribute virtually.

We will:

- Consider how Members can be supported to continue to use their Welsh language skills confidently at meetings and events on the estate;
- Look at ways of providing more manageable and user-friendly simultaneous translation equipment and technology;
- Develop individual plans and provide tailored support to any Members who wish to feel more confident in using their Welsh language skills at proceedings or events;
- Consider the information provided to witnesses taking part in proceedings in order to convey the fact that meetings will be held bilingually, and that Members will use both languages;
- Consider the role of committee chairs in encouraging Members and witnesses to use both official languages;
- Support Senedd Commission staff or Members' support staff who wish to make more use of their Welsh language skills in their work.

## Learning and improvement

The Coronavirus pandemic has forced us as an organisation to make significant changes to the way we work, with little time to consider the consequences of those changes. It is important that we record the changes made and any impact they have had on the way we deliver our bilingual services.

We will:

- Look at the advantages and disadvantages of virtual meetings and events in terms of the use of both official languages;
- Consider any research published by other bodies on the impact of the pandemic on either official language to see if there are recommendations we can adopt;
- Consider what elements of the provision can be retained as we move back to a more normal situation including holding meetings and events on the estate, or in hybrid form;
- Share our experiences of providing bilingual services during the pandemic with others.