Stepping Forward
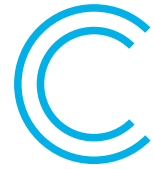
The Welsh Language
Commissioner's assurance report
2020-21

Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

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The Commissioner's Foreword

It has been a year like no other - as the Covid-19 pandemic forced us all to live our day-to-day lives in different ways, public sector bodies in Wales have also had to adapt quickly to a 'new normal'. A 'normal' where meetings and appointments were held virtually; a 'normal' where it did not matter where staff answering the telephone were geographically located; a 'normal' where reception services could not be provided as usual and a 'normal' where instructions and messages were regularly and urgently published to an entire population on social media.

The pandemic has certainly presented many challenges and continues to do so, but it has also provided opportunities for our public organisations to deliver services in different and innovative ways. A few organisations embraced the opportunity to secure Welsh language provision, while others failed to take the opportunity to ensure that new arrangements maintained and promoted the provision of services to Welsh speakers.

Usually, in my annual assurance report, I express an opinion on how public organisations have taken action to comply with their statutory language duties. The emphasis this year however is different as I'm keen to recognise how difficult the period has been, particularly for those working in the health sector and within other key public sector organisations across Wales.

As such, the purpose of this report is to summarise what we have learnt to date about the impact of the pandemic on public organisations' Welsh language provision and Welsh speakers' experiences of services – not only the barriers that have had a detrimental impact but also the effective practices identified. Its main value being that it highlights the lessons to be learnt so that organisations can take action to strengthen future provision and increase the use of the Welsh language.

The Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly change the way public services are delivered in Wales from now on and some organisations will need to adapt in response to the messages in this report, as others have already done. They must act to ensure, not only that they provide the public services that Welsh speakers are entitled to, but that they also take seriously their responsibility for their promotion to encourage the citizens of Wales to use them.

Aled Roberts
Welsh Language Commissioner
September 2021

1 Report summary: main findings

This section provides a summary of the Commissioner's findings on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public sector organisations' use of the Welsh language during 2020-2021.

Guidance is provided following the challenging time of the pandemic, to give public organisations an opportunity this year to learn from the findings and to take action to strengthen provision and increase the use of the Welsh language to the future - it is their responsibility to ensure that they comply with their duties.

Organisations have taken advantage of opportunities to innovate and strengthen Welsh language services provision

- A few organisations were able to innovate and respond urgently early in the pandemic, introducing new online services in Welsh. It demonstrates that organisations can consider the Welsh language from the outset when implementing projects.

- As meetings became virtual some organisations found technical solutions to enable continued use of the Welsh language. Others however, reported that they could not adapt and were unable to provide a service in Welsh or enable staff to use the language when working.

  The Commissioner produced urgent guidance: <u>Holding bilingual video meetings</u> to provide practical advice to organisations on how bilingual services can be offered virtually. Simultaneous translation provision is still lacking in some online meeting platforms and as such, organisations need to put in place alternative arrangements to enable use of the Welsh language.

- Although there has been great pressure on organisations' translation services during the pandemic with the requirement for them to publish important and lengthy material as a matter of urgency; it appears that many succeeded. Developments to the arrangements of a few organisations, which include technical solutions, demonstrate the efforts made to adapt and be more flexible to ensure that the Welsh and English languages continue to be used side by side.

  The Commissioner has an advice note: Bilingual drafting, <u>translation</u> and face-to-face use of the Welsh language which provides guidance to organisations on how to make innovative, effective and responsible use of translation services of all kinds to facilitate the offer of bilingual services of the highest quality. This report also provides examples of organisations that have established arrangements for the urgent translation of text and processes for prioritising specific types of information where the capacity of the translation service has been affected, as in a situation of pandemic.

Barriers highlighted the already emerging gap between organisations that comply well and those that do not have adequate arrangements in place

- Organisations with robust self-regulation processes were able to anticipate and deal better with difficulties that arose during the pandemic. They were most likely to have Welsh-medium provision that was resilient enough not to be adversely affected. They put business continuity arrangements, or specific supervision arrangements in place to continue to comply with their duties during the challenging period.

  Organisations that failed to continue operating need to take a look at the arrangements of those who succeeded. The Commissioner has an advice note: [Overseeing compliance](#) that provides guidance on putting accountability, performance management and verification arrangements in place to ensure that an organisation is meeting its duties.

- Urgent decisions were made by some organisations without regard to the Welsh language. As a result, in a few situations a Welsh language service wasn't available as it used to be.

  Organisations need to amend their emergency response plans and strategies to ensure that consideration is given to the impact of decisions on Welsh language provision, they need to have robust business continuity arrangements in place that include continuing to promote use of the Welsh language.

- Although the translation services of some organisations coped well during the pandemic emergency statements and materials about the pandemic were published in English only or published in Welsh later than English.

  Organisations need to ensure that their translation services are resilient enough to allow them to publish important information in Welsh; this could require the development of translation services, the adaptation of arrangements or an increase in the Welsh language skills capacity of the workforce more generally.

- The move to virtual meetings demonstrated the reliance of organisations on the provision of online communication platforms of large multinational companies in order to comply with the standards and use two languages.

  The Welsh Government already operates strategically with the relevant companies. This is an essential step in order to enable organisations to hold virtual meetings in two languages and to ensure that employees' use of the Welsh language is not restricted as part of new working arrangements.

The importance of promotion activity was highlighted, to increase use of the Welsh language

○ The Welsh language standards place a duty on organisations not only to provide Welsh language services but also to promote those services, to ensure that people are aware of them and use them. As more public services are delivered digitally because of the pandemic, it needs to be recognised that a cohort of users assume, on the basis of experience, that services will not be available – it is essential to inform them that the services are available to ensure increased use of the Welsh language.

Organisations need to ensure that Welsh language services provided are effectively promoted and resources allocated to enable this.

○ New practices were adopted as new patterns of working were introduced during the pandemic – for example, staff who did not previously draft Welsh language text were encouraged to do so rather than rely on translation services, as there was a need to move quickly to share key messages.

It is an important time for organisations to consider what interventions they can plan and deliver as an integral part of the introduction of new ways of working, to increase the use of the Welsh language in the workplace.

○ A few organisations took advantage of the new online provision of the National Centre for Learning Welsh 'Working Welsh' programme to provide opportunities for staff to develop their Welsh language skills. The potential for higher numbers to take advantage of the new provision has become apparent as the investment in terms of time and travel costs is reduced and more flexibility in terms of study time.

Those organisations who found it difficult to maintain provision during the pandemic need to consider what adaptations they can plan and deliver to provide opportunities for their staff to develop their Welsh language skills.

○ Organisations will face new and different policy decisions because of the pandemic, and it is essential that the impact on the Welsh language is fully considered.[1]

During 2021-22 organisations subject to Regulations No. 1 should consider the impact of Covid-19 on the Welsh language when reviewing and adapting their promotion strategies for the next 5 years – impacts such as the changes to working practices on the housing market in some counties and the opportunities arising from the Government's intention to establish community hubs.

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[1] in line with the requirements of the policy making standards

2   Context: regulation during the pandemic

2.1   During March 2020 when organisations across the public sector in Wales were putting plans in place to deal with the exceptional circumstances resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commissioner had a responsibility to consider its impact on his ability to exercise his functions under the Welsh Language Measure. Welsh language standards and Welsh language schemes remained in place and safeguarded important rights – he wanted to see opportunities to use the Welsh language maintained despite the challenges of the pandemic.

2.2   The Commissioner stated in his assurance report for 2019-20, <u>Closing the Gap</u>, that he saw a risk of a significant gap developing between organisations that have made considerable progress since the introduction of the Welsh language standards that are complying well with their statutory duties, and those that didn't have adequate arrangements in place to ensure compliance. It became clear that there was a risk that the pandemic could intensify the trend particularly as a few organisations, where concerns already existed about non-compliance, were relocating staff with responsibility for the Welsh language to other departments to undertake work related to the pandemic.

Adapting regulatory methods

2.3   To assist efforts to prevent the spread of the virus, the Commissioner wanted to avoid putting additional pressure on public sector bodies. He realised that the priority over the challenging period to come, for health sector organisations in particular, would be to manage the task of preventing the spread of Covid-19 and to deal with the increasing pressure of caring for a significant number of patients. He anticipated that the employees of some organisations would need to work under intense circumstances, and he did not want them to have to deal with additional stress whilst the demands on them were at their peak. Organisations in other sectors would also be likely to have to change their usual arrangements, with fewer staff available and many working from home. The Commissioner anticipated that they too might not be able to always follow normal processes, and that there would be significant constraints on time and resources. However, he considered the responsibility of organisations to share information and advice to the citizens of Wales continues an important service.

2.4   The Commissioner contacted public sector organisations at the end of March 2020 to share information on how he intended to adapt his regulatory approach under the circumstances. He emphasised that he still had a duty to regulate and asked organisations to continue to do their best to use the Welsh language when engaging with the public as far as possible. He urged organisations to put adequate translation arrangements in place as part of their preparations to communicate with the public and advised that it would be for the organisations to make decisions about how to use the Welsh language when sharing emergency information, depending on the circumstances and any crisis situations during the pandemic.

Applicability of Welsh language standard duties in a pandemic

2.5   Organisations were notified in March 2020 that exceptions had been included in the Welsh language standards regulations that take account of emergency situations that may be relevant to the current pandemic. For example, regulations No. 2, 5 and 7 allow consideration to be given to excluding the requirements of a body to supply a service when an emergency occurs and the service provided by it is necessary for the purpose of preventing, controlling, or mitigating an aspect of that emergency, and that there is an urgent need for the service. Therefore, in circumstances where the relevant conditions are met, there would be no requirement for some organisations to comply with some of the Welsh language standards.

2.6   Several requests were received from organisations for clarity about the applicability of their duties – investigations into complaints received by the Commissioner from the public subsequently highlighted that there was still a lack of understanding in the case of a few organisations that led to deliberate and unintentional decisions not to comply with the standards. This in turn had a detrimental effect on the provision of Welsh language services to the public.

Postponing the complaints handling process and statutory investigations

2.7   Between April and July 2020 all statutory investigations relating to health boards and NHS trusts in Wales were postponed. Some investigations into organisations in other sectors were also delayed – county councils and Welsh Ministers were informed by the Commissioner that he was willing to delay investigation processes if an organisation informed him that it was unable to respond to provide information within the usual timescale.

2.8   The Commissioner contacted complainants to invite them to comment on his intention to amend the agreed timetable for the statutory investigations he had already begun. Complainants were assured that where the Commissioner decided to delay an investigation, he would recommence the process once he considered it was appropriate to do so.

2.9   It was also decided to defer making decisions whether to investigate new complaints received between April 2020 and July 2020, including all complaints received relating to health boards and NHS trusts in Wales. The complaints process was re-commenced in August as the Commissioner believed that the additional pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic had reduced sufficiently.

> At the start of lockdown, it was more difficult to conduct complaints investigations. This was because quite a few changes had suddenly taken place, officers had to be given the opportunity to cope with the new situation and sort out the new approaches ... we had a period of respite from having to carry out investigations by the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner. As time goes on, and officers start to work in the order of the 'new normal' we are able to deal with complaints in the usual way following the corporate complaints process.
>
> Local authority

> The discretion shown by the Commissioner in dealing with complaints during the period March to August significantly helped to free up officers' time to work to ensure continuity of bilingual services during the challenging circumstances caused by the pandemic. A great number of officers were moved to vital roles at the start of the pandemic (this policy was reintroduced in early October), making it difficult to respond to ongoing investigations. Very few complaints relating to our bilingual services were received by the public during this period.
>
> Welsh Ministers

2.10 A total of 117 complaints were received about organisations that operate Welsh language standards duties in the 12 months between April 2020 and March 2021 – over a third less in number than the previous two years. 24 complaints related to services linked to Covid-19. (A further 11 complaints relating to Covid were received between 1 April and 31 July 2021). During the initial period of the pandemic, fewer complaints were received about public organisations' compliance with the standards than during the same months in previous years. The number of complaints was very low in April and May 2020 but increased subsequently until they returned to usual levels by August and September 2020.

2.11 Some individuals contacted the Commissioner during the year to highlight what they considered to be shortcomings in the provision of Welsh language services but expressed that they did not wish to make a complaint. Many of the concerns related to 'test and trace' services and the Covid-19 vaccination programme and in providing information about their experiences people noted the challenging circumstances in which the organisations were operating as a reason for not wanting to make a formal complaint.

Delaying the process of challenging duties

2.12 The Commissioner was dealing with several requests from NHS Wales organisations to challenge duties under section 55 of the Welsh Language Measure in March 2020. It was decided to allow them more time to respond to the initial comments on their applications than is usually allowed – all applications were finally determined upon by October 2020.

Adapting monitoring methods: conducting a thematic survey on the impact of the pandemic

2.13 The Commissioner had to postpone his usual monitoring and engagement activities during 2020-2021 due to the limitations of the pandemic. He usually conducts a series of mystery shopper surveys to put himself in the user's shoes and to gather direct evidence about the experience of using public services. The Commissioner usually visits reception areas to test front line services, signage provision and self-service points. He also usually conducts surveys to test other services such as telephone, correspondence, and websites. The findings of these surveys are usually the main evidence base for his annual assurance report. Due to restrictions caused by the pandemic this monitoring activity had to be postponed.

2.14 Instead, a Covid-19 thematic study was undertaken in Autumn 2020 to gather the views of public organisations on the impact of the pandemic on their ability to provide Welsh language services. The Commissioner has also relied on information from other sources as an evidence base for his report this year.[2]

2.15 The Commissioner recognises that it is not possible to rely solely on the evidence of the Covid-19 thematic survey to report on the impact of the pandemic on the provision of Welsh language services. Responding to the Commissioner's survey was optional and it is likely that the organisations with the resources and eagerness to respond to the survey had done so and that this could have put a more positive bias on its findings. The Commissioner is therefore not suggesting that the findings are representative of the situation across the board.

2.16 To try and achieve balance and to include evidence from users about their experiences of using public services during the pandemic it is possible to refer to evidence presented to the Commissioner from members of the public in their complaints during the period April 2020 – March 2021, and the findings of the annual Welsh Speakers Omnibus Survey.

Public expectations: Welsh Speakers Omnibus Survey

2.17 The findings of the Welsh Speakers Omnibus Survey annually allow the Commissioner to note if there are changes over time in public attitudes towards Welsh language services provided to them. The findings can be a measure of the extent to which the experiences of people who use Welsh language services have improved as the standards system embeds. This year however, comparison with previous years may not be entirely fair as the pandemic has forced a change in the methodology of the research with a shift from face-to-face interviews to online interviews. The services were also delivered in a different way by organisations.

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[2] Further details on the Covid-19 thematic survey methodology and other evidence sources are in appendix 1

2.18 In November 2020, the Omnibus survey showed:

- That 35% of Welsh speakers believed that opportunities to use the Welsh language with public organisations were increasing and 45% felt that they remained the same – a 2% decrease from last year in those who agreed that there was an increase.

- 16% of Welsh speakers preferred to use the Welsh language when dealing with public bodies, a decrease from the findings of the previous two years (33% and 32%).

- 82% of Welsh speakers agreed that they are usually able to deal with public organisations in Welsh if they wish to do so.

- 20% of Welsh speakers noted that someone had prevented them from speaking Welsh with someone else who also wanted to speak Welsh – a 5% increase in the percentage who reported experiencing interference last year.

2.19 It should be noted that the survey was carried out in November 2020 during a period when the public were unable to use public services to the same extent or in the same way as they had in previous years. Evidence in section 3 of this report confirms that services were not always provided in Welsh on all occasions. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that fewer Welsh speakers stated that they favour using Welsh with public organisations.

2.20 70% of Welsh speakers surveyed agreed that the Welsh language services of public organisations were improving – an increase of 6% over two years.

2.21 61% of Welsh speakers agreed that they felt that the quality of Welsh-language public services was as good as English language services – this represents an increase of 14% over two years.

2.22 43% said that they disagreed that organisations make it clear how to complain if they are dissatisfied with their Welsh language services.

Holding virtual meetings bilingually

2.23 Many organisations in Wales have statutory duties to provide Welsh language services – both to the public and to their own staff. These duties include the requirement to enable people to use the Welsh language at meetings of all kinds, both public and private. These may be meetings of a sensitive nature, for example meetings about an individual's welfare, disciplinary hearings etc. Enabling an individual to use their preferred language in such situations can often be seen as a necessity rather than a choice, and an integral part of organisations' duty of care to individuals.

2.24 Shortly after the start of lockdown it became clear that fundamental changes to people's lives and working patterns because of the restrictions were causing a revolution in the use of technology, particularly those technologies that allow people to hold meetings

remotely. Public organisations were now being forced to maintain services through the provision of virtual meetings and by May 2020 the Commissioner had prepared advice to provide practical guidance on how to continue to offer quality bilingual services. The advice was based primarily on the experiences of the Senedd which had been successfully holding virtual bilingual meetings since April 2020 and the expert input of the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters and the Translation Studies Consortium.

2.25   It was highlighted to the Commissioner by some public organisations that they favoured the use of Microsoft Teams to hold virtual meetings, whilst others adopted different software such as Zoom as the software enabled an additional channel for simultaneous translation. It became apparent that there was a risk of an organisation failing to comply with its statutory duties if the software it used to hold meetings did not enable people to use the Welsh language, let alone the detrimental impact that this could have on people's wellbeing.

2.26   As a result, the Commissioner decided to write to Microsoft in November 2020 to convey his real concern that public organisations that chose to continue to use Microsoft Teams were in danger of failing to comply with their statutory duties and neglected to provide opportunities for people to the Welsh language. In recognising the innovative investment in the past by Microsoft to develop Welsh-language interfaces, he expressed his hope that the company would use the same innovation to support the use of the Welsh language in this context as a matter of urgency – particularly as virtual meetings are now an integral part of people's daily working practices.

Advising on the moral and ethical issues of Covid-19

2.27   A group was brought together by the Welsh Government in April 2020 to provide independent advice to the health service on issues relating to the moral, ethical, cultural and faith matters during the Covid-19 pandemic. The COVID-19: Wales Moral and Ethical Issues Advisory Group provided advice to help the health service manage issues arising from the pandemic in a fair and equitable manner, with the aim of ensuring that all citizens of Wales receive care and respect equally.

International context

2.28   As a pandemic is international in its nature, the impact of Covid-19 on the Welsh language can be considered in a worldwide context. The International Association of Language Commissioners network has enabled the Commissioner to learn about the common challenges the pandemic presented to minority languages across the world and to share information about its impact on the Welsh language to date.

2.29   The Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada reported that the pandemic had illustrated on the one hand the strength and resilience of federal institutions while, on the other hand, has shed a harsh light on what isn't working: specifically, internal structural barriers.

> During times of crisis, the limited capacity of federal institutions to provide services to the public in both official languages becomes apparent. If a federal institution has underestimated the level of language skills required for its employees, despite the tasks and duties of their positions, then during an emergency situation, those employees will likely be unable to respond to the public with the same attention to detail and quality of service in both official languages. The same is true for managers when it comes to supporting their employees.
>
> The COVID-19 pandemic forced our federal institutions to react promptly and decisively … too often, urgent safety communications were issued in only one of our two official languages, and Canadians had to wait for the translation into the other official language. This situation exposed the corporate culture of many work units in federal institutions that do not always prioritize official languages or respect the principle of equality of English and French.
>
> I firmly believe that changes are needed within the federal government so that during emergencies, official languages stop being an afterthought and start being an integral part of crisis management.
>
> Raymond Théberge, Commissioner of Official Languages, Canada

2.30   A report was published by him in October 2020 A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages – a study on the impact of emergencies on official languages. The report's key finding was that one official language often takes a back seat in emergency situations and therefore recommended that the Government of Canada should implement internal procedures and work tools for communications in both official languages, and then evaluate their effectiveness in normal times and in times of crisis.

The complaints my office has received over the past few years, the investigations we have conducted and the report we released on emergency situations clearly show the recurrent nature of this problem. One of the root causes of this issue is the improper assessment of the language requirements of positions, which means that many public servants lack the second language skills to be able to respond to the public or supervise employees in either official language.

In my opinion, the problem relates to a certain lack of maturity on the part of federal institutions when it comes to official languages, which translates into two things: a lack of clearly defined processes and mechanisms integrated into the business processes of federal institutions; and a work environment where employees rarely have the opportunity to speak or work in the non-predominant official language, be it their first or second official language.

Raymond Théberge, Commissioner of Official Languages, Canada

2.31 In his Tuarascáil Bhliantúil Annual Report 2020 the Irish Language Commissioner notes that the state has been facing huge challenges providing for those who needed it most during a time when the world was in the grip of a health, social and economic crisis. He added that valuable experience is being gained as these challenges are addressed which will be of benefit to the public service in the times ahead and that circumstances such as these provide some insight as to how securely rights legislation is embedded in the state administration.

One in five complaints I received this year related to the health crisis; information wasn't available in Irish or there was a delay in providing it in Irish compared to English. One such issue which upset complainants was public bodies erecting English-only signs regarding COVID-19, as if the regulations under the Act simply didn't exist ... This is a substantial and visual failing of a basic statutory obligation which has been in place for over ten years.

The general feeling amongst those who contacted my Office was that the first official language was being brushed aside or that the language and Irish language speakers were being marginalised on occasion, at a time when bringing the public together in common purpose was required.

Rónán Ó Domhnaill, Irish Language Commissioner

2.32   His investigations during 2020-21 found common themes in the responses from public bodies about their statutory obligations – the need to take a particular action urgently that, due to the extremely rare circumstances of the health emergency, led to decisions being taken to not give effect to statutory language obligations, to defer them, or to ignore them as it would delay whatever action was being undertaken.

2.33   The Irish Language Commissioner noted that there should not be any conflict between the serious national actions underway to deal with the pandemic and the responsibilities regarding language rights. He says that the basis of the argument by public bodies is the resource needed to comply with linguistic duties, and that providing services bilingually could lead to delay. If the argument was valid, it would create a situation where service provision in Irish would depend on the particular situation in question and the priorities or resources of the public body - this could lead to a situation where the more important and urgent the service is, the less chance would be for the public to receive them in Irish.

There should not be a conflict between the grave national actions underway and obligations regarding language rights.

Rónán Ó Domhnaill, Irish Language Commissioner

3 The effect of COVID-19 on the provision of Welsh language services

Context

3.1 As already mentioned, the Commissioner conducted a survey in Autumn 2020 to gather the views of public organisations on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their Welsh language provision. This section of the report summarises the evidence received about the impact on service provision – quotations were selected to reflect organisations' different views.

3.2 The majority of organisations responding to the survey reported that the pandemic had no greater impact on their front-line Welsh language services such as reception and telephone services – in comparison with the English-language equivalent – and that Welsh services continued to be offered in the same way they were before the crisis. This however does not mean that the organisations were complying with their duties, simply that they continued to offer the Welsh services to the same extent as before the pandemic.

3.3 Where it was noted by organisations in their response to the survey that there had been no impact whatsoever on Welsh language service provision, this does not mean that Welsh language provision was adequate, or compliant. In addition, because the same duties have not been placed on all organisations and as there are exceptions to some duties in an emergency in some cases, references to delays or shortcomings in Welsh language services during the pandemic do not necessarily mean that there was failure to comply.

3.4 This section also contains some evidence received from members of the public when they presented complaints to the Commissioner between April 2020 and March 2021. They have been selected to reflect different experiences where the Commissioner has successfully completed the investigation process and informed the organisations of his determination and the steps he is imposing to correct any failures.

Front line services

Reception

3.5 Some organisations reported that their reception services had ceased completely as offices were closed (either wholly or to visitors). Where a reception service had restarted or continued, there were suggestions that they had been adapted, e.g. taking place on an appointment-only basis, or with fewer staff.

> Closing buildings and restricting staff numbers made it difficult to obtain / allocate staff with Welsh skills. Many employees were seconded to work in the Tracking, Tracking and Safeguarding section, which reduced the number of Welsh speakers.
>
> Local Authority

3.6 A few organisations noted that adaptations had meant that fewer Welsh-speaking staff were available, but in other organisations it was reported that the capacity of Welsh language services was not affected.

Telephone

3.7 Some organisations reported that they transferred telephone services to the homes of staff without it affecting Welsh language service delivery. However, there were also examples of organisations who had difficulty transferring calls to Welsh speakers, either due to technical reasons or due to a lack of staff. Whilst a few organisations saw a comparable increase in the use of telephone services, others reported that the Welsh services did not increase at the same rate as their English equivalents.

> Telephone calls are still answered bilingually so there is no impact on the answering service. However, telephone calls cannot be transferred directly as staff work from home … there are potential delays in speaking to key Welsh speaking personnel.
>
> Local Authority

3.8 A few organisations referred specifically to new technical solutions that enabled improvements to telephone call transfer arrangements so that a Welsh language telephone service could be provided as staff worked from home.

> We introduced a new telephone system that enabled residents to identify a language choice - English or Welsh - before choosing which service they wanted to talk to an adviser about. With the vast majority of residents wishing to speak in English this meant that, most of the time, our Welsh speaker was already dealing with an English speaker and was not always available. This was identified as a matter of concern and a voicemail saving facility was added, where a Welsh speaker could leave a message which would be transferred to a Welsh-speaking councillor to deal with the issue as a priority.
>
> Local Authority

> A technical solution was urgently needed at the end of March to enable our Customer Care Centre staff to answer calls on our main telephone number from home, using mobile phones. A similar system was in place already for emergencies. This system has been adapted to respond to calls as normal. The first emergency solution introduced at the end of March did not offer the customer a language choice beyond a recorded message in Welsh, but this was resolved very soon to ensure that the system offered a proactive language choice to all customers as usual.
>
> Welsh Government sponsored body

3.9   A few organisations referred to the introduction of online chat as a means of reducing contact through reception and telephone, and had made Welsh speaking staff available.

Meetings

3.10 Introducing online meetings was the most prominent technical development introduced by organisations during the pandemic. Although references were made to difficulties in terms of lack of simultaneous translation in some online meeting platforms, it appeared that some had been able to overcome them by for example, using a platform that does allow simultaneous translation, using two systems to have two audio streams or ensuring that everyone that the meeting (attendees and staff) spoke Welsh.

> We had to urgently review the simultaneous translation element of our work to ensure that the right to speak Welsh at a Court hearing was maintained as they became virtual. The team achieved this by using a combination of CVP (video cloud platform) and a *BTMeetMe* call for the translation. Once the process was approved it was ensured that the translators had the opportunity to try the system and subsequently comprehensive instructions were drawn up on how to use it.
>
> UK Government Agency

> Any meetings with individuals have been held by virtual means due to workplace and wider restrictions. The impact has been similar to the impact on English language meetings in terms of administration and support to ensure effective arrangements. Translation ability is supported through our meeting platform, and we would seek to provide any required language services in the same way as if it were a face-to-face meeting.
>
> Police Commissioner

> Video consultation software enables more Welsh speaking staff to be matched with Welsh speaking patients – this could be more difficult in the previous clinical settings where Welsh speaking staff would need to travel long distances to meet patients.
>
> Health Board

> A key development for us as an organisation has been the introduction of online fitness to practice hearings, which have taken place remotely, using Zoom, since September 2020. During these hearings, a simultaneous translation service is available, to ensure that participants can do so in the language of their choice (English or Welsh).
>
> Welsh Government sponsored body

> The Council installed Microsoft Teams throughout the organisation. It is positive that the Welsh Government is developing work so that Teams can facilitate the use of simultaneous translation. We are constantly looking for continuous improvements and learning lessons as we adapt to a new way of working and using new technologies.
>
> Local Authority

3.11 However, some organisations confirmed that they had introduced video meetings that did not enable the use of the Welsh language, and that having to move to conduct online meetings had restricted their ability to enable the use of the Welsh language. The evidence did not always explain what the reasons were for not using a platform that allows for simultaneous translation – a few indicated that concerns over safety was a factor.

> Our organisation's preferred solution for virtual meetings *Webex* prevented the use of Welsh, as simultaneous translation is not currently available. Some regional meetings which would usually have offered simultaneous translation did not offer this when meetings were held virtually.
>
> Local Authority

> As staff were working from home during the pandemic, it meant that face to face meetings were either cancelled or carried out via MS Teams which does not support simultaneous translation.
>
> Local Authority

> It is not possible to watch a meeting of my local council's Cabinet on its Welsh language website, unlike the English version of the website where it is possible to watch the meeting smoothly.
>
> Member of the public, November 2020

A member of the public complained about their local council's webcasting service. The Commissioner decided to investigate the complaint because he considered that streaming meetings has been a service that local authorities have provided for some time. The case also raised questions about the third-party provider's understanding of the requirements on the council.

It was reported that the company proving the service on behalf of the council had experienced technical challenges in using secure and appropriate software and providing equipment to enable a meeting to be recorded and uploaded remotely to the internet. The council acknowledged that it was aware that it was not possible to watch the meeting on the Welsh version of the webcasting website, although it was available on the English version of the website. By the time the Commissioner completed the investigation the council had modified the process of archiving meeting recordings to ensure that the meeting could be watched on the Welsh and English webcasting website.

The investigation has highlighted the need to ensure that service adaptations are planned in a way that takes account of the requirements of the Welsh language standards and that plans for responding to an emergency should be amended to ensure that consideration is given to the impact of decisions on Welsh language provision. The need for organisations using third parties to provide webcasting services was also highlighted to ensure that providers were clear about any requirements under Welsh language standards.

Written materials and text

Correspondence

3.12 The majority of organisations responding to the survey noted that Welsh correspondence had not been affected by the pandemic, with some detailing that normal processes were in place. A few referred to English only correspondence being sent, or that there were delays in sending a Welsh version.

All new correspondence was sent to students in Welsh and English. When registration was introduced online, all automatic messages from the central Information System were sent in both English and Welsh.

Further/Higher Education College

All correspondence is treated in the same way as before the pandemic, with no difference between Welsh and English.

Police Commissioner

On very rare occasions messages have been sent in English only with Welsh following shortly afterwards, for example when we are required to provide urgent responses to our student cohort following lockdown announcements by Ministers. This is due to additional pressure on our usual translation providers which has led to some delays.

Further/Higher Education College

The Translation Team has been continuing to provide a full translation service from home. A message was sent to Senior Management at the start of the lockdown to inform that there was no impact on the translation service. The translation team prioritised any letters, press releases, job descriptions specifically related to Covid-19.

Health Board

3.13 A few organisations noted that responding to correspondence in Welsh was a service not available at all during the period.

> Correspondence was considered to be an emergency and staff were not required to translate. Ensuring communication from staff meant that translation was not always possible and that the number of communications grew daily. We are slowly returning to a regular communication schedule.
>
> NHS Wales organisation

> The Welsh e-mail service had been closed between 20 March and 6 August 2020. Customers were able to contact us in Welsh on our social media. All online services worked well, and I encouraged customers to use them when possible (they continue to be the easiest and quickest way to discuss with us).
>
> UK Government Agency

> Paper correspondence, post and emails were handled in the usual way during and after lockdown. However, at times, due to the flow of electronic correspondence and tremendous work pressure on officers during this period, the response time for some correspondence was slower than normal. However, the situation was the same in relation to correspondence in both languages – there was no additional delay in responding to Welsh correspondence.
>
> National Park Authority

> I have sent e-mails in Welsh to my local council regarding council tax direct debit payments – the Council has only responded in English.
>
> Member of the public, May 2020

A complaint was presented by a member of the public alleging that he had received English correspondence from his local council on two occasions in response to e-mail correspondence sent to him in Welsh. The Commissioner decided to investigate the complaint because there was a suggestion that the failure was a systemic practice rather than a one-off error.

The investigation confirmed that the correspondence had been sent to the complainant by a member of staff during the Covid-19 pandemic while all Council staff were isolating and working from home. The Council had already produced a clear guide for staff which explained the steps to be taken to respond to Welsh language correspondence. It acknowledged that it had responded in English to correspondence received in Welsh because a member of staff offered a quick response.

The investigation has highlighted the importance of raising staff awareness of their responsibility to implement any guidance or procedures that have been adopted. It shows that business continuity arrangements need to be put in place to ensure that an organisation considers the impact of circumstances on the Welsh language during challenging times.

Documents and materials

3.14 In the majority of cases, organisations noted that the pandemic did not affect their ability to produce materials in Welsh – some referred to the importance of translation services,

> Other emergency documents and materials were published in English only, e.g. the information/correspondence containing health and safety information published at the height of the crisis. The decision was made in the light of a number of circumstances: to ensure that relevant health and safety information is available in a timely manner; a large number of staff were temporarily redeployed to help with the Council's response to the outbreak and therefore limited the Welsh language capacity; as well as the new ways of working for staff at such a critical time. Where there were no separate versions of Welsh and English documents, it was possible to produce/publish separate Welsh and English versions etc.
>
> Local Authority

that were under additional pressures, to achieving what was required. The majority of organisations explained that their usual arrangements had remained in place. Some noted that there were some cases where urgent statements or materials regarding the

> At the start of lockdown, a letter was sent to all residents in English only informing them of the Community Friend Response Scheme which was being established to help vulnerable people in the county. This was due to the urgency of the letter and people joining the service.
>
> Local Authority

> Our translation system works effectively remotely so there is no language impact on documents. An English only document happened when a Covid outbreak occurred over a weekend and we needed to get information to parents urgently on our website on a Sunday evening, but this was corrected first thing on the Monday by our translation team (the team does not work on weekends).
>
> Further/Higher Education College

pandemic were published in English only, or that there was a delay before a Welsh version was produced, due to difficulties translating the material quickly enough, as the situation was changing quickly or at short notice.

Complaint about sending correspondence

> I received a letter and a leaflet by my local council through my letterbox. This included information in English only about the Covid-19 pandemic.
>
> A member of the public, April 2020

A complaint was made by a member of the public claiming that they had received an English only document from the local council with information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. The Commissioner decided to investigate as it appeared that a strategic decision had been made by the Council not to correspond in Welsh.

The investigation confirmed that the Council did not have any Welsh speakers in its Communications Team at the time and considered that delays would be inevitable if it sent correspondence in Welsh. The council acknowledged that they had sent the correspondence to the individual in English after making a decision on health and safety grounds and a lack of resources during a challenging period. The Commissioner ruled that the Council had failed to comply because it had made an intentional decision to ignore the requirements of the standard when sending the correspondence about a new

service to support vulnerable residents during the pandemic; time had been spent deciding on the content and design and it was the Commissioner's opinion that the Council should have made every effort to ensure that there was also time to create Welsh versions. It was noted that he expected to see an effort by the Council to maintain its Welsh language services at all times.

The investigation has highlighted the importance of revising emergency response plans and strategies to ensure that consideration is given to the impact of decisions on the Welsh language. The importance of establishing a process for prioritising specific types of information where the capacity of the translation service has been affected was highlighted. It has been shown that consideration needs to be given to how to ensure that emergency materials are published at the same time in Welsh and there may be a need to consider the capacity of the normal translation service, the arrangements for urgent text translation or the Welsh language skills capacity of the workforce more generally.

Websites and online services

3.15 It was reported by the majority of organisations that the pandemic did not affect their ability to provide web pages and online services in Welsh. A few noted that a few pages or services had been published in English only, or that there was a delay in publishing the Welsh version, due to an inability to obtain a translation quickly enough or to undertake development work in parallel.

3.16 Some organisations referred to new services and information introduced online – a few very

We had to develop a number of online forms at short notice. These included a business grant application form, a childcare booking form, an order form for our Waste and Recycling Centres, a click and collect order form for Libraries and booking forms for Leisure Centre activities. In order to produce these within the required timescales, a number were initially produced in English only. Those still in use, such as the Waste and Recycling Centre order form and the click and collect order form for Libraries, are now available in Welsh. Other forms are no longer in use.

Local Authority

At the start of the crisis some urgent messages were published on the website in English first with Welsh following once the message was translated, sometimes an hour or two later. The e-mail sent on March 17 – The Welsh Language Commissioner's regulatory work during Covid-19 – suggested that this was acceptable. Once the process was refined, the messages were simultaneously made public. As more of our services were offered digitally, we also realised that there was insufficient capacity in our translation department which led to a decision to appoint an additional translator.

Further/Higher Education College

early during the pandemic either at the same time or shortly after the English language service. This included high profile online services that affected a large number of people that were developed urgently in response to the pandemic.

UK Government Department for Work and Pensions: offering new online services at short notice

New services were announced online by the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions during the first few months of the pandemic in 2020. Developments were already underway as part of the Department's commitment to improving customer satisfaction levels, but the work programme was speeded up at the start of the pandemic.

The system that enables applications for Pension Credit to be made online was built in just 4 weeks to enable the Pension Credit service to go live online in May 2020. It was noted by the Department that it was not possible to launch the Welsh language service at the same time given the challenging timescales, but it was launched shortly thereafter at the end of May 2020 after a period of testing.

Due to the pandemic other services were focusing their attention on implementing online services, including 'Applying for an online NS ESA', 'Applying for a NINO' and 'Repaying My Debt'. The Department for Work and Pension's Welsh Language Unit worked closely with the relevant project teams to ensure that Welsh versions of these services were also available.

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on much of the labour market, as some sectors have reduced in size and others are increasing rapidly. To help job seekers find work in new sectors and employers to find available employees, the Department also launched two new external websites: job help and helping employers. These websites offer labour market information for people looking for work now and advice for employers to help them recruit them. The Welsh Language Unit worked with the Strategic Communications Team to ensure that Welsh versions of these websites, as well as all assets, tweets, and toolkits, were available and that updates were made promptly.

A new website was added to GOV.UK to help people find out more about Covid-19 and to claim benefits. 'What is Universal Credit?' helps consumers understand what support might be available if they are on a low income or unemployed. Again, the Welsh Language Unit worked with the team responsible for this website to ensure that a Welsh version was also available.

Later as a result of Covid, a Kickstart scheme was introduced to help 16–24-year-olds gain skills to help them get jobs in the future. The Welsh Language Unit supported the team responsible for this project to ensure that all products, guidance, information etc. was available on the GOV.UK website and that the employer portal/Kickstart Portal to apply for the grant, to create work placements, was also available in Welsh.

It was reported that the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS), which is one of the non-departmental public bodies supported by the Department for Work and Pensions' Welsh Language Unit, also introduced a new website called MoneyHelper, and as a result an enormous amount of text needed to be translated during the year, with regular changes to current and new content about Covid on its website.

This practice highlights that it is possible to respond urgently and introduce new services online in Welsh and that that can succeed in considering the Welsh language from the outset when implementing projects. It also shows that an organisation that has established robust self-regulation processes and provides the necessary resources, such as the Department for Work and Pensions' Welsh Language Unit, was able to overcome difficulties – their Welsh language provision was resilient enough not to be adversely affected and they managed to continue to comply with their duties during the challenging period.

Complaint about publishing information on the website

> The local council has published a number of pages containing information about the COVID-19 pandemic in English only on its website.
>
> Member of the public, June 2020

A complaint was received by a member of the public claiming that information about Covid-19 was not available in Welsh on a number of pages and documents of his local council's website. The Commissioner decided to investigate the complaint as the council had not provided any comment about the circumstances of the complaint and an audit confirmed that the organisation had continued to update the website as recently as August 2020. It presented a suspicion that the complaint was a symptom of systemic practice and that an intentional decision had been taken to show, and to continue to show, information in English on the Welsh version of the website.

The council recognised that the period had been challenging as it needed to re-assign responsibilities to its staff because of the pandemic, and that it had a duty to share information with the public as soon as possible. It was noted that the council appeared to have been overwhelmed by the situation and that it was clear that the translation unit was involved in the urgent preparation of information for the website, but that there was not sufficient capacity to translate everything due to the size of the task. It was noted that the council's senior management team had concluded that it was more important to

proceed with placing information in English on the Welsh language website rather than waiting for the translation.

The investigation has highlighted the importance of ensuring that consideration is given to the impact of decisions on the Welsh language and revising emergency response plans and strategies. It shows that particular consideration should be given to the adequacy of translation arrangements to ensure that they are able to cope in periods when workload is higher than normal. The importance of establishing a process for prioritising specific types of information where the capacity of the translation service has been affected, as in a pandemic situation, was highlighted. The investigation also stresses the value of conducting regular audits of a service in order to self-regulate and test compliance and be in a position to anticipate and deal better with any difficulties arising from the pandemic.

New provision

3.17 A few organisations reported that they had increased their online provision during the lockdown period, including developing new application forms and apps, and that this new provision was available in Welsh. In a few circumstances Welsh language services were delivered after the English services. They ranged from high profile online services affecting many individuals to live chat technology that had not been previously used.

Many services and content have been moved online over the pandemic, and so there has been an increase in demand for online material. More videos have been produced, with an emphasis on recording Welsh and English versions rather than subtitling. The pandemic has moved a few projects digitally, such as a project that transcribes Welsh archive material. Documents will be automatically scanned, and any errors corrected, and the project will be responsible for increasing the amount of Welsh language material available on the web.

Welsh government sponsored body

A new online chat service was introduced during the pandemic, and this is available in either English or Welsh. The team working on the chat service is made up of Welsh speaking members of staff, and Welsh enquiries are responded to in Welsh.

Further/Higher Education College

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service: holding virtual hearings with simultaneous translation provision need to place somewhere relevant in the body of the department

In order to ensure that the right to speak Welsh at a Court hearing was maintained when they were held virtually, the Service had to review its simultaneous translation arrangements. By working with the Welsh Judiciary, it was able to secure this, using a

combination of CVP (video cloud platform) and a telephone call on *BTMeetMe* for the translation. Once the process was approved the translators had an opportunity to practice using the system and comprehensive instructions published.

Further improvements were later made to improve the user experience so that the need for a separate BT was removed. This involved using a two-room video scenario, similar to how simultaneous translation works on Zoom.

The practice highlights that the organisation succeeded in rapidly delivering new online services in Welsh, using technology that was brand new to them at the time. It also demonstrates the importance of having a robust self-regulation process that can anticipate and deal with difficulties that arise, allowing business continuity arrangements to be introduced without delay and allowing the Service to continue to comply with its duties.

3.18 A few organisations however noted that new online services had been developed and that there had been barriers to making these available in Welsh.

Online services have been available in Welsh but there was some difficulty at the outset in promoting and accessing a Welsh-medium platform placed on the University's website for the clearing and open days. The problem was resolved leading to increasing numbers visiting the Welsh version.

University

All student recruitment activity had to be moved online. Staff found it challenging to ensure that the presence of the Welsh language was evident in, for example, a virtual open diary. The system used was in English.

University

One Surgery under the control of the Health Board reports that they use AccuRx to communicate with patients via a video link. There are many options with this software to be able to send information to patients immediately through this system in terms of providing advice with their state of health, but these are not available in Welsh.

Health Board

Welsh Government and UK Government Department for Health and Social Services: COVID-19 NHS Testing and Tracking App

The Covid-19 NHS Testing and Tracking App was published urgently in May 2020 for public use in Wales following discussions between the Welsh and UK Government. The

Welsh Ministers were at the time in the process of agreeing a memorandum of understanding about their way of working and the provision of services in Welsh was included as an essential element of it.

When the App was launched it was possible for individuals to access and use it in Welsh completely and easily from the outset if the Welsh language was set as the default language of their device.

The Commissioner received a number of complaints about the App as those individuals were not aware of the need to set Welsh as the default language on their device or had devices that were too old for the App to operate on. As a result, a number of complainants had assumed that the service was not available in Welsh.

Neither the UK Government nor the Welsh Government appeared to have been able to raise public awareness sufficiently before launching the App to explain the limitations and manage expectations, emphasising that this service would only be fully available in Welsh if the device settings allowed it in advance.

It was also unclear at the time who had responsibility for the provision to the public in Wales as the Department for Health and Social Care the UK Government was the publisher of the App, but the Welsh Government was working with the department on the arrangements in Wales. In November it was confirmed by the Welsh Government that they would accept responsibility for Test Trace Protect services.

The Covid-19 NHS Track and Trace App is an example of a high-profile Welsh language service available to the citizens of Wales. It highlights how collaboration between the Governments can have a positive impact in terms of the Welsh language and how Welsh Ministers' statutory duties under the Welsh language standards can influence the provision of services delivered on their behalf by the UK Government.

Social media

3.19 In the majority of cases, organisations responded that the pandemic had not affected their ability to publish messages on social media in Welsh, with a few referring to the importance of a flexible translation service, or the availability of Welsh speakers. A few

> Social media correspondence continued to be in Welsh and English throughout lockdown. The college appointed a new Social Media and Digital Marketing Officer during this period. The successful candidate is a fluent Welsh speaker who was able to continue to provide messages across social media in Welsh.
>
> Further/Higher Education College

> Many of the messages on our social media have been written bilingually by officers within the marketing team – all of whom have continued to work full time from home through the pandemic. Where necessary, the translation team is on hand to provide support.
>
> Further/Higher Education College

> Whilst we continue to publish messages in both Welsh and English the pandemic has affected our ability to do on-site face to face interviews and video clips...there are occasions where some messages has had to be published in English only (as these are out of core business hours where no Welsh language translation is possible and relate to emergency situations). This content is then updated with corresponding Welsh language content as appropriate. In relation to urgent online posts, we continue to mitigate the situation by ensuring that a repository of regular posts has and is being developed in both languages.
>
> Police Authority

organisations noted that some messages had been published in English only, or that there were delays in publishing the Welsh version, due to an inability to obtain a translation quickly enough. Some organisations referred to increased use of social media for user engagement during the pandemic.

3.20 A few organisations said that social media messages were usually available in Welsh but that there were a few situations where this did not happen as it should have.

3.21 Some organisation noted that the majority of their Covid-19 communications were not available in Welsh.

> There was an incident where urgent information was published before the translation was available. This was due to the amount of information that needed to be cascaded to the public and the short timescales to ensure that up-to-date information was provided.
>
> Local Authority

> Communication on social media was in English only at [the Centre]. These were specific to Covid relating to patient information posts and videos providing advice. Most of these videos are now subtitled and are available online.
>
> NHS Wales organisation

> An attempt was made to provide all publications in Welsh at the time, but due to the urgency of the situation, some messages had to be published while the translation was underway, with the Welsh language being added as soon as possible after this. This is no longer the case.
>
> Local Authority

> Most of our messages were published on social media in English only, mainly because of the need for the information to be shared urgently and the interpretation of the correspondence sent by the Commissioner.
>
> Local Authority

3.22 A few organisations noted that additional pressure on the translation service had led to difficulties in publishing and some noted that they had used more social media to engage with the public during the period.

Translation services

3.23 The majority of organisations reported that their translation services continued as usual during the pandemic, enabling text to be provided in Welsh. It is clear from the responses of some organisations that the need to translate large amounts of text urgently placed great pressure on translation services, although this did not always affect the provision of services for users.

3.24 The additional pressure led to some organisations developing their translation arrangements, for example by appointing additional staff or improving processes, and the Welsh Government specifically referred to adapting ways of working and using technical solutions to work more efficiently.

3.25 A number of organisations noted that they had seen an increase in the translation workload.

Use of Welsh language services

We are responsible for providing written translation services to Conwy, Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flintshire Councils and the Welsh Local Government Association. There was a fairly quiet period of some of the counties for a short time in June, but that did not last more than a few weeks. Overall, the only difference we have seen with the written translation service, is that we are busier than ever during most of the pandemic.

Local Authority

We rely on our externally contracted translators to be able to provide timely translation for media releases and other updates released through the Department of Communications and Media. The pandemic has created challenges for our provider(s) in relation to dealing with applications at short notice – and as a result some of our updates have been in English only with Welsh following a short time later as soon as the translation is provided. The rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic has also required a lot of advice/guidelines/ changing rules that are often issued with little or no notice. We have tried to ensure that this information is published in both Welsh and English, but this has been challenging at times.

Police Authority

There was an incident where urgent information was published before the translation was available. This was due to the amount of information that needed to be cascaded to the public and the short timescales to ensure that up-to-date information was provided.

Local Authority

3.26 No consistent pattern was reported in terms of the impact of the pandemic on the extent of the use of Welsh language services – a few organisations noted an increase and some reported that the impact on the use of Welsh language services was similar to the use of English language services or that there was no impact at all.

> We launched a bilingual campaign in March 2020, which gave people advice on how to keep in touch at home during the Coronavirus pandemic. We also had a bilingual advertising campaign over a ten-week period on social media and on local commercial radio stations in Wales. A study by our external agency showed that there was more engagement with Welsh content than English content on social media throughout the campaign in Wales, with a high click-through rate of 0.15%. Our video published in June 2020 attracted over 800 viewers on our Welsh Twitter account which has 305 followers – a very encouraging figure compared to the English version it received around 1700 viewers over the same period although the account has 50.5k followers.
>
> UK Government sponsored body

> The closure of the College resulted in far fewer enquiries than usual. Although the effects appear to be the same as for English, the extent of the impact on the Welsh language is not exactly known. No complaints have been received about the College's Welsh language service provision and overall take-up remains low.
>
> Further/Higher Education College

> At the height of the pandemic, there was a significant increase in the number of people wanting advice and guidance from our student and customer services teams, which in turn put a lot of pressure on our telephone lines and mailboxes. The impact of that, however, was the same for both the Welsh and English language services.
>
> Further/Higher Education College

> From mid-March to the end of April the Department received over 1.8 million applications across the UK (55,000 we would expect in a typical week). The number of those who had chosen to use Welsh increased from just under 1,000 before Covid to over 3,000. Our telephony teams saw a huge growth in enquiries and new applications in Both Welsh and English. Our robust business continuity plans needed to be put in place to enable the Department to do this.
>
> UK Government Department

3.27 A few responses suggested that those organisations do not routinely consider the use of Welsh language services.

Comprehensive online Welsh language services swiftly introduced by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

Building on their already successful bi-lingual services, several new online services were swiftly introduced by HMRC during the pandemic. They include the:

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)/furlough scheme (for employers)
- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) (for the self-employed)
- Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme (for employers)
- VAT Deferral Scheme (for businesses)
- Eat Out to Help Out (for the hospitality businesses)

The organisation reported that its good knowledge of its customer base and its pre-pandemic practices, in terms of its use of the Welsh language in their dealings with them, was central to the success of prioritising translation work to develop and deliver services in Welsh as a matter of urgency.

Comprehensive web-based guidance and telephone support were provided on the Welsh language telephone line that Welsh speaking customers were already familiar with.

Head of Welsh Language Services in HMRC confirmed: 'We knew that we had at least 5,000 SEISS customers who could want to use the online service in Welsh as they were used to submitting and providing files to us in Welsh online – so, we decided to develop this service first and it went live at the same time as the online service in English.

We also knew that we have around 320 employers that use the Welsh language option and tend to contact us by telephone or email. As the online CJRS claim service was set up in an unprecedented number of weeks it could not be translated immediately so we ensured employers could call us and make their claim in Welsh by telephone instead of online. The web-based guidance available in Welsh made it clear customers could use the telephone option to make their furlough claim and we sent e-mails explaining the situation and the support available in both English and Welsh.'

The organisation's Welsh Language Officer worked proactively to ensure liaison with key staff responsible for developing and delivering the services from the outset. Through regular daily and weekly contact, they ensured Welsh language materials were provided at the same time as any English versions. The regular contact ensured that the need for Welsh language services to be available at the same time as the English language services was met. It was made clear that there were no reasons for failing to overcome difficulties and resources and solutions were made easily available to the developers.

Between April 2020 and March 2021 HMRC:

- received over 20,000 calls in Welsh
- received over 1,200 e-mails in Welsh

- processed and responded to over 5,300 letters and forms in Welsh
- translated over 2.4 million words into Welsh
- registered almost 1 million visits and pages of their Welsh language services online – double the previous year's visits.
- delivered paid advertisements and made 1.24 million impressions
- posted key messages on social media to over 400,000 followers
- issued fortnightly emails on all the support available to employers and agents

All services were successfully provided in a period of weeks in Welsh and English, compared to the six months or more usually required. A spokesperson for HMRC's Welsh Language service reported that:

'Key to all of this delivery has been having a dedicated Welsh language officer and allocated Welsh language resources to oversee and work with others across different business areas to deliver this service. Despite the challenges of time constraints. The officer can facilitate and alleviate any issues as they know their Welsh language customer base, they are specialists in that sense. They know how the different elements of Welsh language services can be delivered quickly. They work at pace with others to resolve any restraints or issues. This person needs to be robust, knowledgeable and thrive on adversity. They need to be able to see through issues and work closely and co-operatively with many stakeholders to co-ordinate the delivery of the service.'

This practice highlights how HMRC responded quickly and how it was able to introduce new online services in Welsh during the pandemic by considering the language from the outset as well as maintaining its existing Welsh language services. It also shows that a body with robust self-regulation processes and a designated officer responsible for Welsh language services who can influence effectively across the organisation, made it easier to overcome difficulties and maintain compliance during a challenging time.

4 The effect of COVID-19 on organisations' internal arrangements

4.1 As well as inviting public sector organisations to provide information on the effect of the pandemic on their Welsh language services, the Commissioner also asked for their views on the effect the pandemic had on any internal arrangements to monitor their compliance with their statutory duties. They were asked to report on the resources available to undertake the work and the effect of the pandemic on the use of the Welsh language within the workplace and the qualitative evidence received is helpful in considering the adequacy of organisations' self-regulation processes and their ability to deal with difficulties that arose during the challenging period of the pandemic.

Overseeing compliance

Governance arrangements

4.2 Organisations reported that they had ensured Welsh language provision was considered as part of the organisation's general arrangements for business continuity during the pandemic. Some organisations noted that their corporate business continuity plan included or had considered Welsh language provision. A few noted that they had adopted a specific business continuity plan for the Welsh language.

> The Council's continued compliance with the Welsh language standards has remained an integral part of any consideration in all of the Council's business continuity and contingency plans.
>
> Welsh government sponsored body

> Our quarterly Covid response plans were subject to an equalities impact assessment which included consideration of the Welsh Language … they were approved by the Boards' Operational Committee.
>
> Health Board

> The Welsh language was part of our governance arrangements during the pandemic, and it continues to be considered throughout our processes though impact assessments. Some practical changes were made, for example reviewing our translation processes to deal with the significant demand in some areas.
>
> University

> We had arranged with our translators that a manager from the agency be available out of office hours if urgent translation or proof reading was required.
>
> UK Government sponsored body

4.3   The majority of organisations noted that they had not adopted any special governance arrangements to ensure that Welsh language provision was considered during the pandemic. Some noted that this was because they were confident that the arrangements that were already in place were sufficiently robust and that they had continued to operate on that basis.

Officer with responsibility for the Welsh language resource

4.4   The majority of the organisations that responded to the survey stated that there had not been an effect on the resources available on a day-to-day basis for the work relating to the Welsh language. A few noted that there were some changes to working practices, or that workloads were heavier or more complex than usual. Despite this, some organisations noted that they had moved their Welsh language officers to other roles for a period.

We did not operate any special arrangements during the pandemic, it was business as usual, with the requirements relating to the Welsh language considered as they were prior to Covid. Support was provided to all parts of the business to ensure they could comply with our language scheme, with the team working closely with co-workers in other directorates.

UK Government department

As the Welsh language is already established as our delivery and administrative language, and we have such a high percentage of staff who have Welsh skills, the continuation of Welsh services was not a concern. Welsh language officers' roles were not changed, and their support continued.

Local Authority

The Council has not operated under any special arrangements to ensure consideration of the Welsh language. Rather, we operated the arrangements already in place such as procurement checklists, impact assessments, mainstreaming the Welsh language in policy developments and ensuring the availability of Welsh speaking staff through recruitment and training.

Local Authority

> Welsh language officers within services were diverted onto Covid-19 work to support schools, the most vulnerable and TTP.
>
> Local authority

> The officer was redeployed for nearly four months at an operational level to the Council's Safe and Well Service.
>
> Local authority

> The professional lead for Welsh was redeployed to support critical services from March until September.
>
> Local authority

> Additional responsibilities were taken to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore there was not the same capacity to devote to the Welsh language.
>
> Local authority

Planning and monitoring

4.5   A few organisations had reviewed their usual operational plans for the Welsh language and adapted them to enable operation in the pandemic.

> Our Welsh language operational plan was updated in April because of the pandemic and reviewed again in July. This reflected the fact that the nature of much of our provision changed to be digital.
>
> Welsh Government sponsored body

4.6   Some organisations reported that they had developed additional arrangements to monitor compliance, and others had continued with arrangements already established such as:

- review of customer service arrangements to ensure compliance.
- ensuring that the way they arranged the workforce ensured the continuity of the Welsh language provision.
- communicating with staff regarding the need to continue to comply during the pandemic.
- ensuring that translation services were available, including outside usual office hours.
- arrangements to ensure that any new services developed were delivered in Welsh.

4.7 Most organisations noted that there was no effect on their arrangements for monitoring compliance, but some did acknowledge that the task was harder than usual, primarily because it was not possible to discuss with staff in the same way, or to check provision at their locations.

A special meeting of the Police's working group for implementing the Welsh language was held to ensure that the work to deliver bilingual services continued to receive attention. Otherwise, it was 'business as usual' in terms of Welsh language services, with the expectation that language choice was delivered as usual.

Police Force

Our Compliance Officer was completing ad hoc audits of our social media to ensure that the Welsh language continued to be evident.

Local Authority

We completed a 'mystery shopper' exercise to ensure that there was no impact to the quality of our Welsh services; including answering correspondence, dealing with forms and the telephone service. We gained a high level of assurance from the services sampled.

Welsh Government sponsored body

It was possible to complete most of the monitoring processes by sampling from afar. Adaptations were made to the timetable of random checks with the online services checked during the strictest restrictions and then random checks of more visual and physical elements when rules were relaxed.

Further/Higher education college

It has been harder to monitor compliance as each Officer is working from home. There has been a significant reduction in face-to-face services. However, during the period, we have reminded Officers of their duties, by publishing Standards Guidance: 'What do I need to do' and have shared this through the Corporate News bulletin. We have also held two language awareness sessions online. Before the end of the year, we will ask each department to self-assess their services against the requirements of the standards.

Local Authority

4.8   A few organisations noted that they had put additional measures in place, or that the monitoring work was more effective by the Autumn than previously.

There was an impact on monitoring compliance during the period. As the Welsh language team was working from home it wasn't possible to visit the health board's sites and hospitals which forms a large part of the monitoring work. The Welsh language team conducts quarterly mystery shopper surveys that involve visiting three community hospitals, three surgeries under the control of the health board and three departments within the acute hospitals. It hasn't been possible to undertake these surveys. In addition, four members of the team were redeployed to provide support in another health board department. As a large number of other health service staff were in the same position, working from home and redeployed or re-trained to do other duties, it took longer to respond to e-mails.

Health Board

A negative answer was given as it is hard to keep an overview of compliance in a large and complex organisation in a period of significant change and when everyone is scattered. Remote working does not make it impossible to monitor compliance but as things settle to a more regular pattern, we need to think how we can ensure that the required level of monitoring is maintained.

University

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs: anticipating difficulties and putting business continuity arrangements in place to maintain compliance during the pandemic

'Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) had planned thoroughly in advance and started preparing business recovery plans for the translation team two weeks before the lockdown was announced. Every member of the team was equipped to conduct business as usual from home and any new working methods were piloted. All of the team worked successfully and completely from home from the first day of lockdown.

The team providing support to Welsh customers was part of the initial trial to get everyone to work from home safely. This ensured that our Welsh language services were not affected or restricted by limited access to the office. Our customer service was maintained for Welsh speaking customers from day one and throughout the pandemic.

'We identified one gap, namely our ability to issue manual repayments where specialist printing was required for cheques and needed to be in the office to do this. We worked quickly with finance colleagues to come up with a new process and customer contact that led them towards a digital option for refunds directly to customer accounts.'

This practice highlights the importance of placing robust business continuity arrangements in place for Welsh language services. This ensures that the impact of

any circumstances on the Welsh language are considered, and that action is taken to maintain compliance during challenging times.

4.9   The Commissioner received some enquiries from organisations indicating that they would be unlikely to publish the Welsh language standards annual report by the required day, but none indicated that they would be unable to publish at all. Compared to 2018-19, there has been a deterioration in the performance of organisations in every set of regulations in terms of publishing their Welsh language standards annual report. Evidence from the Commissioner's survey of the supplementary standards during autumn 2020 confirms that 71% of the organisations required to publish a report had done so on time, in Welsh, and had dealt with how they complied during 2019-20.

Dealing with complaints

4.10   Very few comments were received from organisations that responded to the Commissioner's survey in relation to the impact of the pandemic on their complaints handling arrangements. No comments suggested that an organisation had received a significant number of complaints about their provision or had difficulty in dealing with them.

4.11   The majority of organisations either stated that they had continued to deal with complaints in the usual way or that there had been no impact whatsoever on their arrangements, or that no relevant complaints had been received during the period. A few organisations noted that there was some impact from changing working arrangements.

> Working from home raised a number of issues in terms of contact internally with staff. A number of employees were also seconded to other business areas that provide front line services. Additional duties, IT issues and various competitive demand on staff meant that responses [to complaints] were less prompt. Staff working from home made it more difficult to have a chat /catch-up, something that would have happened in the office.
>
> Local Authority

Policy decisions and promotion of the Welsh language

4.12   Although a few organisations adapted their arrangements for general policy decisions, the majority did not report that their duty to consider the impact of policy decisions on the Welsh language was adversely affected by the pandemic. A few organisations referred to improvements made during the period to the processes to consider the impact of decisions on the Welsh language and some confirmed that they considered the Welsh language within the organisation's usual equality impact assessment process.

4.13   The majority of organisations noted that there had been no change, with some detailing the processes that continued in the same way.

The impact of policy decisions on the Welsh language continues to be administered using the Council's existing processes and resources. No new procedures are in place as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Local Authority

An equality impact assessment is in place which includes the impact that the policy decision can have on the Welsh language. Staff have continued to make these assessments for any policy or project decision. To date no assessment has highlighted that the intended work has a negative impact on the Welsh language.

Welsh Government sponsored body

We have arrangements in place to ensure that any business projects or requests for change consider whether there is an impact on the Welsh language service. This process has continued during the pandemic period and our activities to explore how we can continue to improve the Welsh language service have continued throughout the period.

UK Government Department

Arrangements affected

4.14 A few organisations noted that the pandemic had made them adapt their arrangements to consider policy decisions in general, so the impact on the Welsh language was the same as on other matters.

During the pandemic period, as a result of the speed with which decisions were being made, new policies/legislation formulated did not always allow full, integrated assessments to be conducted. However, a steady flow of communication was shared with staff reminding them of their statutory duties to consider the effects of decision making and they were given new guidance on taking proportionate and reasonable steps to ensure that any decisions took account of impacts on the Welsh language.

Welsh Government

No policy decisions were made, and the publication of the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report was delayed due to COVID19 as committees were suspended.

Local Authority

> The organisation has been placed in formal crisis response mode, which means that new decision-making arrangements have been put in place to deal with the pressure to respond rapidly to changing circumstances. This has meant that the evidence trail to support decisions may not be as robust as it might normally have been.
>
> Local Authority

> The Council's current policy is to use an integrated impact assessment tool to consider the impact of policy decisions on the Welsh language. During lockdown, fewer policy decisions have been introduced in Cabinet, this because services have to diversify in order to be able to deal with and try to manage the current pandemic.
>
> Local Authority

Impact assessment arrangements developments

4.15 A few organisations reported that they had developed their processes for considering the impact of policy decisions during the period.

> A number of policies had to be adapted because of Covid that has provided a further opportunity to look again at the impact of policy decisions on the Welsh language. A new corporate process has been introduced for approving policies which provides an opportunity to use the latest advice from the Good Practice Document on Policy Making.
>
> Further/Higher Education College

> During the pandemic, the policy impact assessment process has been updated and now the Welsh language officer views all assessed policy decisions for comment.
>
> Local Authority

> We routinely consider the equality and diversity implications of any new policy or initiative, and do not believe that any policy decisions undertaken during this time had a negative effect on the opportunities to use the Welsh language. As a result of the Welsh Language Commissioner's recent consultation on the Welsh Language Standards, we took the decision to consider whether our Equality Impact Assessment could be made clearer to draw out specifically whether the new policy would affect opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.
>
> Health Profession Regulatory Council

There was a period over April and May where democratic Council meetings were not being held, so the responsibility for decisions was delegated to the Chief Executive. Gold and Silver Committees have been established to lead on those decisions.

This period has allowed us to complete the development of an Integrated Impact Assessment, with specific questions regarding the impact of decisions on the Welsh language. There is a link in the guidance for Heads of Service and Managers to the Welsh Language Commissioner's document 'Policy Making Standards: Creating opportunities to use the Welsh language and not treating the Welsh language less favourably than the English language'

Local Authority

4.16   One health board noted that the pandemic had prevented a piece of work to improve the consideration of the Welsh language in policy decisions across health organisations.

4.17   A few other organisations noted that the pandemic had motivated them to take better account of the Welsh language in decisions.

Several departments reported that the pandemic had given them the opportunity to look at areas afresh. The reopening was an example of this, as procedures in place for decades had to be significantly modified, with the Welsh language being a central consideration on this occasion.

Welsh Government sponsored body

The heightened interest in the disadvantage created by Covid-19 lead to a desire to extend provision of services through both languages – for example Zendesk used as an operational innovation to improve the impact of a policy decision.

Welsh Government sponsored body

Work on an all-Wales Equality Impact Assessment process including a Welsh Language impact assessment has been delayed. This is needed to improve assessment of the effect of policy decisions on the Welsh Language.

Health Board

Recruiting a workforce with Welsh language skills

4.18   The majority of organisations noted that there was no impact on their assessment of the need for Welsh language skills when recruiting. In a few cases, organisations reported that they had introduced improvements to their assessment processes during the period. A further 59 organisations noted that there had been no change and 3 organisations

confirmed that they had not undertaken assessments of the need for Welsh language skills when recruiting during the period.

> Work on the Language Designations project has been able to continue during lockdown and a new system put in place to monitor and a number of positive steps have been taken within the period.
>
> Local authority

> Language assessments were not carried out due to the crisis of the situation. Additional skilled staff were needed and language was not a factor in this.
>
> NHS Wales body

> For the new and vacant posts considered during lockdown, normal HR procedures were followed in terms of considering Welsh language skills.
>
> Local authority

4.19 A few organisations, including three health boards, reported that they had developed their recruitment arrangements during the period.

> The recruitment rate has slowed considerably during lockdown. However, we have undertaken specific campaigns to recruit to specific sectors e.g., carers and cleaners. All of those posts have been placed at level 3 in terms of Welsh language skills in advertising. In terms of the 521 posts advertised since April 2020 until early October, 394 of the successful candidates held higher skills in Welsh than the level at which the post was advertised. This suggests to us that there has been a positive response to the posts from Welsh speakers in the local community.
>
> Local authority

> New procedural guidance was introduced in April 2020 to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards so there has been a positive impact throughout the Covid pandemic.
>
> Health Board

> No impact was seen as robust arrangements had been put in place to ensure that key staff within the HR teams were able to work remotely – ensuring that routine arrangements were followed.
>
> Welsh government sponsored body

> We're always aware of the need to recruit Welsh speakers and that has been no different during the COVID pandemic. Due to the need to recruit 13,500 employees across the UK to support the increase in benefit applications, we have again made specific job vacancies campaigns for bilingual (Welsh/English) work coaches. The approach to recruitment has changed, due to the increasing number of staff required. A micro-website for work coaches was launched to support the recruitment campaigns, which provided all the information that applicants needed for them to consider applying for the posts, including the roles and responsibilities of a work coach post, background information on the Department for work and pensions, frequently asked questions, list of vacancies by region, application process. Our Welsh Language Unit collaborated with staff in the People and Ability and SSCL teams to produce a Welsh version of this website.
>
> UK Government Department

4.20   However, the body responsible for health sector recruitment nationally reported that the pandemic has delayed a strategic recruitment project because there has been and continues to be a high demand on job creation to respond to the crisis and that has put huge pressure on their Workforce and Development teams.

> We recognise that we need to re-start the strategic work by reviewing and recreating a Bilingual Skills Strategy for the organisation, creating an information portal on the Workforce and Organisation Development intranet pages, and developing a specific training module for managers to recruit either online or in class, for them to be aware of what is expected as we assess Welsh language skills for vacancies.
>
> NHS Wales organisation

Developing Welsh language skills

4.21   The impact of the pandemic on organisations' Welsh language learning provision varied. If lessons had continued, it was mostly online, sometimes after a period of delay. The provision of a few organisations (particularly those with smaller numbers of learners) had ceased altogether.

4.22   Although there were a few references to difficulties, a number of organisations noted that the online lessons had worked well. Some organisations reported that they had seen an increase in staff accessing the provision, with several suggestions that online learning was suiting more people better; a few organisations, on the other hand, had seen a reduction in their numbers.

4.23   It was reported by some of organisations that they had established new or additional provision for learning Welsh, for example *Say Something in Welsh*, during the period, and that the response was positive.

The National Centre for Learning Welsh: innovation to offer more opportunities to develop the Welsh language skills of the workforce

The National Centre for Learning Welsh responded to the challenging circumstances presented by the pandemic to enable learners to continue to develop Welsh language skills in their workplaces. In March 2020, as face-to-face learning was forced to stop, a significant reduction in funding and a developing public health situation the Centre started adapting its Working Welsh programme, that provides support to develop Welsh language skills in the workplace.

In October 2020 a self-studying Learn Welsh course was published online for the first time, offering learners the ability to follow a course at an entire level at a time convenient to them. This first course was at Entry level, the aim being to continue to develop a similar course at the other levels over the coming year.

The development responded to the growing demand for flexible approaches to learning and the emphasis from the very beginning has been on the use of the Welsh language in the workplace. Although the course is a self-studying one, a tutor also offers support, giving advice and help, virtual chat and question and answer sessions.

By the end of March 2021 over 800 individuals from over 60 employers, had registered to study the new course – the majority of them working for public sector organisations.

The Centre reported that more employers than ever engaged with them during 2020-21. The course has appealed greatly, especially to employers such as the health boards, who previously found it difficult to offer provision where staff had to attend weekly lessons at a set time in the workplace. The ability to follow a course at a time convenient to the learner means that the course is popular with people working a shift – traditionally a hard-to-reach cohort in terms of course delivery.

By March 2021 the Working Welsh budget had been restored to the previous level and the National Centre for Learning Welsh can again offer a wide range of courses to employers, continuing to innovate and offer a range of learning methods as the Working Welsh scheme is developed.

Internal use of the Welsh language

Informal conversations

4.24   There were differences of opinion with regards to the effect the pandemic had on opportunities to conduct informal discussions and on provision to develop Welsh language skills – some reported that a move to working from home had reduced the opportunities for people to speak Welsh with each other in informal settings at work, and that this had particularly affected those staff that depended on these opportunities to improve their confidence.

4.25 Some organisations noted that previous patterns had continued with conversations and meetings online. Some organisations noted that they had arranged new opportunities online for staff to use the Welsh language informally or socially.

Internal meetings

4.26 The majority of organisations noted that there was no effect on the language of internal meetings, or that previous patterns had continued. (In general, our conclusion prior to the pandemic was that English is the language used predominately in internal meetings in the majority of organisations).

4.27 A few organisations noted that the inability to use simultaneous translation on platforms such as Teams was a barrier to using Welsh in internal meetings. A few organisations noted they had ensured that staff could take part in Welsh during internal meetings.

Drafting and written work

4.28 The majority of organisations noted that the pandemic did not have an impact on the way that staff drafted text. A few organisations referred to the help and support available for staff to draft in Welsh, including mentoring and proofreading, and a few noted that the situation of the pandemic had led to an increase in their staff drafting in Welsh, partly due to the pressure on translation services.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

1. Although gathering evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on the provision of Welsh language services has been more challenging during 2020-21 due to the circumstances of pandemic the Commissioner has been able to rely on information from the following sources:

   - evidence of the experiences of members of the public who submitted complaints to the Commissioner
   - findings of the annual Welsh Speakers Omnibus Survey
   - the findings of the Covid-19 thematic survey undertaken in September 2020 to gather evidence from organisations on the impact of the pandemic
   - regular discussions during the year between the Commissioner's officers and the public organisations that have a statutory duty to provide services to people in Wales when dealing with enquiries or issues relating to their compliance
   - a survey carried out to check organisations' compliance with the supplementary standards.

Welsh Speakers Omnibus Survey

2. For several years the Commission has been commissioning Beaufort Research to undertake work to gather information on Welsh speakers' attitudes to and experiences of using the services provided by public organisations. Due to the pandemic the survey methodology was slightly different during 2020-21 from the methodology in previous years.

3. The sample was usually designed to be representative of Welsh speakers aged 16 and over in Wales by looking at a proportion who can speak Welsh within the 22 Local Authorities in Wales. The COVID-19 public health pandemic prevented the survey from being conducted in its usual face-to-face interviewing at sample points across Wales and instead conducted online interviews using an online panel exchange platform. The online survey was formed for completion on a PC/tablet and smartphone and all respondents were offered Welsh and English versions. An opening question is asked (Do you speak Welsh?) to ensure that the respondent speaks Welsh and is therefore eligible to be interviewed. Fieldwork for the survey was undertaken during November-December 2020. A total of 424 interviews were completed and analysed.

Thematic study of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

4. 224 public organisations operating Welsh language standards or Welsh language schemes were invited to take part in a review by the Commissioner in September 2020 about the impact of the pandemic on their:

   - Welsh language services
   - Compliance arrangements
   - Internal use of the Welsh language.

5. It was noted that the review was not intended to enable the Commissioner to reach a view on organisations' compliance but rather to:

   - Learn the impact of the pandemic on the experiences of users and staff
   - Understand the robustness and rooting of organisations' arrangements for complying and considering the Welsh language
   - Identify barriers to the continuation of Welsh language provision, at an individual organisation level or systemically
   - Identify examples of innovation and good practice that organisations have implemented in order to safeguard Welsh language provision.

6. 121 (54%) of the questionnaire organisations – 90 of them (75%) implement the duties of Welsh language standards and the remainder implement Welsh language schemes. A copy of the questionnaire is at Appendix 2 and a list of the organisations that contributed is at Appendix 3.

7. We received evidence from a wide range of organisations from each of the sectors operating the different Welsh language standards regulations (numbers 1 to 7). The evidence therefore provides a picture of the impact of the pandemic on the provision of Welsh language services across the spectrum of public organisations.

Appendix 2: Impact of Covid-19 on organisations' Welsh language provision survey questions

Welsh language services

1. **Impact on specific Welsh language services**
    Give your opinion on the pandemic's impact on the Welsh language services stated, and the reasons for the impact. When considering whether any effect was positive or negative compared with the English equivalent, you can consider:

    -   Was the service available at all / less often?
    -   Was the service available as timely as usual or were there delays?
    -   Was the service as accurate / of as high a standard as usual?
    -   Was the service as prominent and accessible, and promoted as well as usual?

    To what extent did the crisis affect the use of Welsh language services?
    What were the reasons for the impact?
    Services: Reception, Phone, Correspondence, Meetings with individuals, Meetings with multiple persons / open to the public, Documents and other materials including press statements, Websites and online services, social media
    Options: Positive effect compared with the English language service; No effect at all; Similar effect to that on the English language service; Negative effect compared with the English language service; Not applicable; Don't know

2. **Impact on use of Welsh language services by the public**
    To what extent did the crisis affect the use of Welsh language services by the public?
    Options: Positive effect compared with the English language service; No effect at all; Similar effect to that on the English language service; Negative effect compared with the English language service; Not applicable; Don't know
    What were the reasons for the impact?

3. **Technical solutions**
    Have you developed or implemented any new technical solutions as a result of lockdown, to facilitate the organisation's contact with the public?
    Options: Yes, No
    How have these solutions affected the ability to the Welsh language?
    Options: Facilitated the use of Welsh; No effect; Prevented the use of Welsh
    What were the reasons for the impact?

Compliance arrangements

4. **Developments – governance and the Welsh language**

Did you implement specific arrangements during the crisis in order to ensure that the Welsh language was considered, and the Welsh language provision continued, for example through a business continuation plan / varying responsibilities / changing procedures?
Options: Yes, No

5. **Impact on compliance arrangements and resources**
Give your opinion on the crisis's impact on the arrangements and resources stated, and the reasons for the impact. When considering the impact, and whether it was positive or negative, you can consider:

- Was the same level of resource available?
- Was the same level of expertise available?
- Did the work happen as timely a way as usual or were there delays?
- Was the work as accurate / of as high a standard as usual?

To what extent did the crisis affect these arrangements and resources?
What were the reasons for the impact?

Arrangements and resources: Welsh language officers; Overseeing compliance; Dealing with complaints; Translation services; Considering the effect of policy decisions on the Welsh language; Assessing the need for Welsh language skills for new and vacant posts.
Options: Positive effect; No effect / Changes with a neutral effect; Negative effect; Not applicable; Don't know

Internal use of the Welsh language

6. **Impact on internal use of the Welsh language**
To what extent did the crisis affect the use of Welsh by the organisation's staff in these situations?
Situations: Informal conversations; Internal meetings; Drafting and written work, e.g., documents, forms, correspondence; Developing Welsh language skills, e.g. Welsh language lessons
Positive effect; No effect / Changes with a neutral effect; Negative effect; Not applicable; Don't know
Give details of the impact, including specific examples where possible. What were the reasons for the impact?

Other

7. **Other developments and impacts**
Are there any other developments or impacts that you have seen as a result of the crisis?

Appendix 3: Public organisations that contributed to the Covid-19 impact survey

ACAS
Aneurin Bevan UHB
Animal and Plant Health Agency
Bangor University
BBC
Betsi Cadwaladr UHB
Blaenau Gwent CBC
Books Council of Wales
Bridgend CBC
Bridgend College
British Council
British Transport Police
Cabinet Office
Caerphilly CBC
Cambrian Training
Carbon Trust
Cardiff and Vale College
Cardiff and Vale UHB
Cardiff Council
Ceredigion County Council
Coleg Cambria
Coleg Gwent
Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion
Coleg y Cymoedd
Companies House
Conwy CBC
Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB
Data Cymru
Denbighshire County Council
Department for Education
Department for Work and Pensions
DVLA
Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Commissioner
Education Workforce Council
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Estyn
Flintshire County Council
General Medical Council

Glyndŵr University
Grŵp Cynefin
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
Gwent Police
Gwynedd Council
Hafren Dyfrdwy
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HM Courts and Tribunals Service
HM Inspectorate of Probation
HM Revenue and Customs
Hywel Dda CHC
Hywel Dda UHB
ICO
Independent Office for Police Conduct
Informatics Service
Isle of Anglesey County Council
Judicial Appointments Commission
Law Commission
Learning and Work Institute
Legal Aid Agency
Monmouthshire County Council
National Museum Wales
National Savings and Investments
Natural Resources Wales
Newport City Council
NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership
North Wales Fire and Rescue Service
North Wales Police
NPT Group of Colleges
Ofcom
Office for National Statistics
Office of the Public Guardian
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Parole Board
Pembrokeshire College
Pembrokeshire County Council
Powys CHC
Powys Teaching Health Board

Public Health Wales
Royal Commission on the Ancient and
Historical Monuments of Wales
Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC
S4C
Snowdonia National Park Authority
South Wales Fire and Rescue Service
South Wales Police
South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner
Sport Wales
Student Finance Wales
Swansea Bay UHB
Swansea University
Torfaen CBC
The College Merthyr
The Consumer Council for Water
The General Osteopathic Council
The Health and Care Professions Council
The National Botanic Garden of Wales
The National Library of Wales
The National Lottery Community Fund
The Nursing and Midwifery Council
The Police and Crime Commissioner for
Gwent
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher
Education
University of South Wales
UWTSD
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Valuation Office Agency
Velindre University NHS Trust
Wales Millennium Centre
WCVA
Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Welsh Government
Welsh National Opera
Welsh Water

Appendix 4: Glossary

The following glossary is used in the report to refer to the number or proportion of organisation that provided evidence on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their Welsh language provision, as part of the Commissioner's survey:

a few = between 1 and 12 organisations (up to 10%)
some = between 13-60 organisations (10-50%)
majority = between 61-80 organisations (50-70%)
many = 81 or more organisations (over 70%)