



Independent
Case Examiner

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Welsh Language Scheme: 2007

Introduction

Under the Welsh Language Act 1993 every public body providing services to the public in Wales has to prepare a scheme setting out how it will provide those services in Welsh. This document provides details of the Welsh Language scheme provided by the Independent Case Examiner's Office.

Having accepted the principle that both the English and Welsh languages will be treated on a basis of equality when conducting public business and administering justice in Wales, the Independent Case Examiner's scheme sets out how we will give effect, so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable, to the principle established by the Welsh Language Act.

In this scheme, the term **public** means individuals, legal persons and corporate bodies. It includes the public as a whole, or a section of the public, as well as individual members of the public. The term includes voluntary organisations and charities. Directors and others representing limited companies are also within the meaning of the term 'public'. It does not, however, include persons who are acting in a capacity, which is representative of the Crown, Government or the State. Consequently, persons who fulfil official functions of a public nature, even though they are legal persons, do not come within the meaning of the word *public* when they are fulfilling those official functions.

Further information about the scope and purpose of the Welsh language schemes can be found in the Welsh Language Board's guidelines (www.welsh-language-board.org.uk).

This scheme was prepared under Section 21 of the Welsh Language Act, and in accordance with guidelines issued by the Welsh Language Board, under Section 9 of the Act. It came into effect on 20 February 2007.



Background to the organisation

The Independent Case Examiner acts as an independent referee if clients feel that the Child Support Agency, the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency, or the Social Security Agency in Northern Ireland has not treated them fairly or has not dealt with complaints in a satisfactory manner.

The Independent Case Examiner is also responsible for raising systemic issues and recommendations with the Agencies and for engaging with them at a senior level to raise awareness about lessons arising from our handling of complaints. At the end of the financial year, the Independent Case Examiner publishes an Annual Report, which provides statistical and case specific information, as well as an overview of the service provided by the Agencies.

The Independent Case Examiner is supported by a team of approximately 98 staff located in Liverpool who carry out gateway, resolution and investigation work, provide support services and offer day-to-day help to people who have need of our service.

Our contact details are:

The Independent Case Examiner
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Chester
CH99 9SA

Telephone number for enquiries
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Minicom: **0151 801 8888**

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E-mail: ice@ukgov.demon.co.uk

Website: www.ind-case-exam.org.uk

Service Planning and Delivery

New policies and initiatives

The Independent Case Examiner's Office will ensure that all new policies and initiatives will facilitate the use of Welsh wherever possible. In addition we will seek to use such new policies and initiatives as an opportunity to move the Independent Case Examiner's Office closer towards the ultimate goal of full equality between the English and Welsh languages in the delivery of service to the public in Wales.

The steps the Independent Case Examiner's Office will take to deliver those services through the medium of Welsh are set out in more detail in its Action Plan which has been produced in addition to this Policy.

When we contribute to the development or delivery of policies, initiatives, services or new legislation led by other organisations, we will do so in a way which is consistent with this scheme.

Delivery of services

We will ensure that as many as possible of our services are available in Welsh, and we will advise the public accordingly.

Standards of quality

We will ensure that services provided in Welsh and English will be of equal quality and will be provided within the same timescales.

Dealing with the Welsh speaking public

Written communications

The Independent Case Examiner's Office welcomes correspondence from the public in Wales in Welsh and in English and will ensure that corresponding through the medium of Welsh will not by its nature lead to a delay.

Letters received in Welsh which require a response will receive a reply in Welsh and the same principle will apply to any correspondence following other forms of contact whether by telephone, e-mail, Internet or other electronic communications media, where the member of the public has indicated that preference. Our target time for replying will be the same as for replying to letters written in English.

When we send standard or circular correspondence to several recipients in Wales, it will be bilingual unless we know that all recipients would prefer to receive it in Welsh or English only.

If the Welsh and English versions of any correspondence have to be published separately, our normal practice will be to ensure that both versions are available at the same time.

Enclosures sent with bilingual letters will be bilingual, when available.

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The above will apply to e-mail correspondence as well as paper correspondence.

All hard-copy Welsh correspondence that we issue will be signed.

We will use the Welsh Language Board's scoring system to identify objectively any standard or circular correspondence which need not be published in Welsh, or bilingually (for instance, when the correspondence is very technical or lengthy).

Telephone communications

Because of our location it would not be practicable for us to conduct telephone conversations in Welsh. However, when we set up telephone help-lines, or similar facilities, to give information services or support to the public in Wales we will provide a Welsh Language service. This will be advertised alongside the English language service. Both services will share the same telephone number.

Public meetings

We will provide simultaneous translation from Welsh into English at our public meetings unless we have established that all participants are likely to use the same language.

Invitations and advertisements for public meetings in Wales will be bilingual and either note that translation facilities will be available or invite the public to let us know in advance which language they wish to speak. We will let those attending public meetings know when translation facilities are available, and encourage contributions in Welsh.

Our normal practice will be to provide papers and other information for public meetings in Wales in Welsh and English, and for reports or papers produced following public meetings to be published in Welsh and English.

Other meetings with the public in Wales

Because we do not have offices based in Wales, it would not be practicable for us to conduct face-to-face meetings with the public through the medium of Welsh.

Our public face

Publicity campaigns, exhibitions and advertising

All of the publicity, public information, exhibition and advertising material we use in Wales will be produced bilingually, or as separate Welsh and English versions. If the Welsh and English versions have to be published separately, both versions will be equal with regard to size, prominence and quality, and both versions will be available simultaneously and will be equally accessible.

Publications

Our normal practice will be to publish material made available to the public bilingually, with the Welsh and English versions together in one document.

If the Welsh and English versions have to be published separately (for instance, where a single document would be too lengthy or bulky), both versions will be of equal size and quality, and our normal practice will be to ensure that both versions are available at the same time and are equally accessible. Each version will note clearly that the material is available in the other language.

We will use the Welsh Language Board's scoring system, to identify objectively when material should be published as separate Welsh and English versions or as bilingual documents.

If not available free of charge, the price of a bilingual document will not be greater than that of a single language publication, and the price of separate Welsh and English versions will be the same.

The above will also apply to material made available electronically on our website.

Websites

Our website will include pages in both Welsh and English, and our normal practice will be to provide Welsh versions of the interactive pages on our websites.

When designing new websites, or redeveloping our existing websites, we will take into account the Welsh Language Board's Bilingual Software Guidelines and Standards.

Whenever, we post English language publications on our websites, the Welsh versions will be posted at the same time, if available.

Forms and associated explanatory material

We will ensure that all forms and associated explanatory material for use by the public in Wales will be fully bilingual, subject to the scoring system referred to below, with the Welsh and English versions together in one document. This will include interactive forms published on our websites.

If the Welsh and English versions have to be published separately (for instance, where a single document would be too lengthy or bulky), both versions will be of equal size and quality, and we will ensure that both versions are available at the same time and are equally accessible. Each version will note clearly that the material is available in the other language.

We will use the Welsh Language Board's scoring system, to identify objectively when forms and associated explanatory material should be published as separate Welsh and English versions or as bilingual documents.

Corporate identity

We will adopt a bilingual corporate identity in Wales. Our name, contact details and other standard information will appear in Welsh and English on all material which displays our corporate identity.

Official notices, public notices and staff recruitment notices

Official notices, public notices and staff recruitment notices placed in English language newspapers (or similar media) distributed mainly or wholly in Wales, will be bilingual, or appear as separate Welsh and English versions. Notices will be in Welsh in Welsh language publications.

The Welsh and English versions will be equal in terms of format, size, quality and prominence, whether produced as a single bilingual version, or as separate Welsh and English notices.

Any official notices, public notices or staff recruitment notices placed elsewhere in Wales will be bilingual.

Press releases and contact with the media

Press releases to the Welsh language press and broadcasting media in Wales will be issued in Welsh where deadlines permit.

Implementing the scheme

Staffing

We have no offices located in Wales. However, we will seek information about the Welsh language skills of job applicants and existing staff.

Recruitment

For any posts having extensive and regular contact with the public in Wales we will consider whether fluency in Welsh should be desirable or an essential skill, and this will be stated in job competencies and advertisements.

Language training

We will support and fund training for staff that, as part of their duties, have extensive and regular contact with the public in Wales, and who wish to learn Welsh or improve their Welsh. We will allow staff to attend courses during work time.

Information and Communications Technology

The need to provide information and services in Welsh, and operate in accordance with this scheme, will be catered for as we develop, design and purchase information and communications technology products and services.

As we develop or procure ICT systems we will take into account the Board's Bilingual Software Guidelines and Standards.

Internal arrangements

The measures in this scheme carry the full **authority**, support and approval of our organisation.

Managers will have the **responsibility** of implementing those aspects of the scheme relevant to their work.

We will appoint a senior member of staff to **coordinate** the work required to deliver, monitor and review this scheme.

We will prepare, and continuously update, a detailed **action plan** to be agreed with the Board, setting out how we will ensure that we will operate in accordance with this scheme. The action plan will come into effect on the date in which the scheme comes into effect. The plan will include targets, deadlines and a report on progress against each target.

The scheme will be **publicised** to our staff, and to the public in Wales. It will be published on our website in a prominent place.

We will produce **desk instructions** or similar guidance, for our staff to ensure that they know how to implement the measures contained in this scheme.

We will arrange **briefing and training** sessions for our staff to increase awareness of this scheme, and to explain how it will affect their day-to-day work.

We will ensure that we use only qualified **translators** or interpreters to help with the delivery of this scheme.

Any form of contact with the public in Wales, which is not specifically dealt with by this scheme, will be undertaken in a manner which is consistent with the general principles of this scheme.

Monitoring

We will monitor our progress in delivering this scheme against the targets set out in its accompanying action plan.

Our existing monitoring and reporting procedures will include reference to progress in delivering this scheme, as appropriate. We will send monitoring reports to the Welsh Language Board, when requested by them, outlining progress in delivering this scheme.

Reviewing and amending the scheme

We will review the scheme within four years of its coming into effect. We may also need to review this scheme, or propose amendments to this scheme, because of changes to our functions, or to the circumstances in which we undertake those functions, or for any other reason. No changes will be made to this scheme without the Welsh Language Board's approval.

Complaints and suggestions for improvement

Monitoring the incidence and nature of complaints relating to our Welsh language scheme will be included as part of our current complaints procedure. The target time for the clearance of complaints relating to the Welsh Language scheme will be the same as for all other complaints about our service.

The ICE Office has a complaints procedure in place, which will include complaints about our scheme. Our bilingual leaflet "The Independent Case Examiner's Office Our service and standards" provides details of our complaints procedure and how our customers can supply comments or suggestions on the service we provide. This information is also available on our website at www.ind-case-exam.org.uk. Complaints related to this scheme, or suggestions for improvement, should be directed to the address provided in our leaflet (also provided on page 3 of this document.)

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the way we have handled their complaint about our scheme, they have the right to complain to the Welsh Language Board. Further information can be found on the Board's website (details of which are provided on page 2 of this document.)