

Post legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 - to assess the perceived successes and limitations of the legislation, and the impact and effectiveness of Welsh Language standards in improving and increasing access to Welsh language services.

The Arts Council of Wales was established by Royal Charter and has the Welsh language firmly embedded within its constitution. Supporting the use of Welsh as a creative living language and ensuring an environment where artists can pursue their career in the language of their choice is at the heart of our corporate plan. We are positive, willing and, we believe, successful champions of the language.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 legislation required us, in law, to do much of what we were already doing in practice. However, having a legal framework has stretched us to do even more – in particular it has increased bilingualism in the internal operations of the Arts Council of Wales. This means, for instance, that our staff now has access to all HR functions in Welsh and we are working towards a fully bilingual intranet. It has also made us focus on the quality of our Welsh language services in order to maximise the use of them. We are sending our key writers on a Cymraeg Clir course and extending Welsh language learning opportunities. We have also recruited Welsh speaking staff into our HR and IT teams to support the use of the Welsh language internally. We are committed to achieving high quality translations.

Since the introduction of the legislation the visibility of the Welsh language within the Arts Council of Wales has increased. Bilingualism is now established as the norm when communicating with all staff and there has been a significant increase in bilingual training and facilitation.

Working in Partnership

The Arts Portfolio Wales (APW) – the major organisations who we fund regularly – are our main partners in delivering the arts and arts development in Wales. We require them all to have Welsh language plans outlining how they will work towards meeting the legislation. This is a condition of our funding.

It is one of our corporate goals to see all the venues that we support providing a welcoming and inclusive environment. This means places where communities and visitors can expect to be able to ask for their tickets, order their drink at the bar and to enjoy their entertainment through the medium of Welsh. We also aspire to be able to offer participatory activities in the language of choice for participants.

Capacity and resource issues sometimes limit our ability to deliver all that we would wish. But the potential is there. We believe very strongly that we should make a positive contribution to the profiling of Welsh as a living language by making it a key priority of our work across all areas of the arts.

Using our Influence

As the stewards of public funds we are aware that we have a gatekeeping role in terms of encouraging new development and monitoring the effectiveness of more well-established activity. We are both guide dog and guard dog. We have an explicit responsibility to exercise this role in relation to the Welsh language. We receive around 1,500 applications for funding each year. We take an active role in our scrutiny and assessment of applicants' plans in relation to language provision. And we require bilingual promotional material for everything that receives our funding. However, this is far more than a legalistic issue of compliance. We celebrate, promote and defend the Welsh language for cultural, social and creative reasons. So we try as best we can to see beyond the rules and regulations. Our advocacy of the Welsh language is as concerned with the spirit of the legislation as it is with the letter of the law. This is a principle that is applied across our work.

In our view, the Standards have had a number of practical benefits for us as a public body. But these have come at a cost (especially for the smaller organisation like us). Translation is expensive and, despite an increase in the number of staff able to work in Welsh, translation is not something we expect them to undertake in addition to their normal professional roles. Consequently there can be bottlenecks as documents are queued for translation. This could make us more circumspect about publishing as a result.

We also experience a number of smaller organisations and individuals relying on Google Translate for smaller sections of text, which often results largely incorrect or incomprehensible Welsh language marketing / web content. People are trying to operate in the spirit of the act and often turn to the availability of quick and cost effective tech based translation facilities to ensure public information in both languages but there are considerable problems with the quality of this at the moment. The use of Welsh by the tech giants should be a priority and is something we alone cannot address. In the interim there should be an increase in the awareness of the need for good translations that capture the essence of what is communicated in the original language and that Google translate cannot provide this at the current time.

But overall the Standards have raised the profile of the Language in a positive way and the imperative for public bodies to adhere to the Standards has resulted in a raising of the bar - especially in terms of increasing the use of the Welsh language in the workplace.

What is less clear is where the developmental impetus is coming from – the innovative programmes of work that are seeking imaginative ways of encouraging and incentivising people to use Welsh. At the moment it feels all about compliance. As we move forward from this point, it would be good to see the balance move more in favour of developing the use of the language in everyday situations and activities. Our own data demonstrates the standards have had arguably little or no impact on increasing and improving access to Welsh Language arts activities. The number of applications we receive in the Welsh language and/or for Welsh language activities or productions has decreased if anything. This is a corporate concern and has been picked up as something we want to address through our new corporate plan. We want to see more Welsh language events – particularly for young people who have learnt the language in Welsh medium education but then find themselves unable to use it as a living language in everyday life. It's important that we use any legislative frameworks and public partnerships to support and encourage the use of the language, not hinder it.

To assess whether the legislative framework supports or limits Welsh language promotion and its use.

Initially the legislation led to some challenging conversations. It exposed gaps in capability and capacity. But this is a hearts and minds game as much as anything else. Our portfolio of funded organisations is, on the whole, very supportive of the need to encourage and facilitate the use of the Welsh language in everyday life. In the participatory arts, there is an increasing demand for Welsh language practitioners to lead workshops and classes. There seems to be an appetite – particularly from those who work with young people – to grow the use of the Welsh language in a practical nonacademic way.

As we move beyond the initial compliance stage, it would be good to see more systems of support, advice, exemplars and mentors readily available to assist those who need them. The current legal framework of the Well-being of Future Generations Act might possibly provide a better means of integrating the work of public bodies in promoting the Welsh language and it would be good to see this used to its full capacity.

We are currently working on a partnership project with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner – Art of the Possible – where one of our Portfolio Managers is seconded to advise on the goal of a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. It is hoped that this project will develop resources to more fully support Public Bodies to meet their duties in regard to the Act and to provide practical examples of how this can be more fully achieved in public life. It will be interesting to see how this progresses and how it may be able to dovetail with other legislative duties on the Welsh language.

An international perspective - gathering evidence on legislation to protect and promote minority language planning in other countries.

No specific comment.

A Welsh version of this document is available.