

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill

Paper 2: Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru

1. Response to questions about the draft Official Languages Scheme

1.1 Question 10

1.1.1 Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru is generally of the opinion that the draft Official Languages Scheme will allow the National Assembly for Wales to realise its ambition of being a truly bilingual institution and by doing so will give the people of Wales a strong and practical lead.

1.1.2 We very much welcome the statement in paragraph 98, page 47, “that only accredited translation and interpretation staff undertake text translation and simultaneous interpretation, and they will be encouraged to be members of the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters[*], or a similar professional organisation”. The Translation and Reporting Service has already demonstrated its commitment to this principle in 2011 by stating that only the Association’s Full and Interpretation members would be considered for its on-call translation contract.

* please note that the registered name of the association is Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru. Please use our official company name in this paragraph. You may wish, for explanatory purposes only, to include the English ‘translation’ in parenthesis.

1.1.3 Technology has an important role to play in translation, whereby specialist translation software embodying translation memory software is used in conjunction with machine translation software. Software alone, however, will not ensure linguistic and factual accuracy. The only way to ensure a quality translation is by entrusting the work to professionally qualified translators and editors.

1.1.4 We also agree with the statement in the second part of paragraph 98 that there shouldn’t be an over-reliance on translators and that Welsh speaking staff with the necessary skills should be encouraged to provide a bilingual service. We would encourage you to emphasise, where appropriate, the need to improve the skills of National Assembly staff to write Welsh as part of the commitment to develop Welsh-language and bilingual skills. We also hope that the bilingual skills strategy to be published before the end of March 2012 will accord its proper place to measuring the written skills of staff and that sufficient resources will be allocated to provide the necessary training.

It is equally important to encourage National Assembly Members and staff to improve their spoken Welsh, and the use of interpretation services at meetings will provide opportunities not only to speak Welsh but to gain greater confidence in using the language. Issuing instructions regarding the chairing of bilingual meetings will be important in this context.

1.1.5 We welcome the statement, in paragraph 51, page 37, that external organisations will be expected to submit responses in both Welsh and English as this will lead to strengthening the use of Welsh in public institutions throughout Wales.

1.1.6 In paragraph 77, page 41, does 'preferred language' mean any language in which the applicant sends a request? As this is, presumably, not the intention, we suggest that it should be made clear that the 'preferred language' is limited to Welsh and English.

1.2 Question 11

We welcome the fact that the Assembly Commission has agreed to re-establish a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings and has provided for this in the Official Languages Scheme.

We believe that providing a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings should be at the heart of the National Assembly's ambition of being a truly bilingual institution which allows its Members and staff to work in both languages.

In August 2009 we released a statement deploring the decision of the Assembly Commission to stop producing fully bilingual transcriptions of plenary meetings of the National Assembly. At the time we were concerned that this could set a precedent for other institutions in the public sector to reduce the number of important documents being translated. This is especially true today at a time when institutions have to face difficult decisions about reducing services.

A fully bilingual Record of Proceedings should be central to the National Assembly's intention, as stated in paragraph 46, page 36, of "empowering Assembly Members with bilingual materials and the means to communicate with each other and the public bilingually." It is important that a Welsh translation of all statements and debates are factually and linguistically correct and are consistent.

2. Response to questions about the Bill

2.1 Questions 1,2 and 3

2.1.1 Given that the Official Languages Scheme is not governed by the legal framework outlined in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, a Bill which provides for the use of both Welsh and English in the discussions of the National Assembly and by the Assembly Commission in undertaking its duties is appropriate in setting legal obligations on a strict legal footing.

2.1.2 We believe that the Bill achieves the purpose as stated in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4, page 6, of the Explanatory Memorandum.

2.1.3 We welcome the fact that section 1(2) of the Bill confirms the official status of the Welsh language in the National Assembly and that Welsh and English will enjoy equal status. It must be acknowledged, however, that the provision in paragraphs 58-60, page 38, of the Explanatory Memorandum does not fulfil the aim of treating the two languages on the basis of equality in that priority is given to providing a quick translation into English (for very valid reasons) of words spoken in Welsh whereas any equivalent translation into Welsh must wait.

2.2 Question 4

We believe that there is a danger that the new sub-paragraph (6), that nothing is to be interpreted as requiring all words spoken or written in one of the official languages to be interpreted or translated into the other, could be construed to mean that the Assembly Commission will not have to provide a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings.

This ambiguity should be removed from the Bill and specific reference should be made to the Record of Proceedings to make it clear that a fully bilingual record will be published.

3. And finally

We welcome the comprehensive review you propose to undertake in the summer of 2012 of the effectiveness of the system adopted by the National Assembly to translate the Record of Proceedings and we would be happy to contribute. We would also urge you to seek the views of the Canolfan Bedwyr Language Technologies Unit at Bangor University which has developed a number of translation aids over the years, including a new platform which integrates them into one comprehensive system tailor-made to meet the needs of English-Welsh/Welsh-English translation.

Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru would be glad to assist the Assembly Commission as you consider the best means of providing translation and interpretation services.