	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 09/07/2007</p> <p><b>Twice as nice or double trouble? Bilingual working in the Welsh Assembly Government Library &amp; Publications Service.</b></p> <p><b>Rebecca Davies</b> Head of the Assembly Library &amp; Publications Service / Pennaeth Gwasanaeth Llyfrgell &amp; Cyhoeddiadau y Cynulliad Information Management Division / Is Adran Rheoli Gwybodaeth Welsh Assembly Government / Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ Wales United Kingdom e-mail / e-bost rebecca.davies12@wales.gsi.gov.uk</p>
<p><b>Meeting:</b></p>	<p><b>97 Government Libraries</b></p>
<p><b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL</b> 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa <a href="http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm">http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm</a></p>	

### **Abstract**

*The National Assembly for Wales is the democratic body created in 1999 to take over the powers of the Welsh Office, the old government department, bringing real political power to Wales from Westminster, London.*

*The Government of Wales Act, 2006 defined the legal separation between the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales which has been in effect from 25 May 2006 when the First Minister was appointed. The relationship between the two is now similar to the UK Government's relationship with the Houses of Parliament. It will be the job of the Welsh Assembly Government to govern Wales, while the National Assembly for Wales will make laws ("Measures"), and scrutinise the Welsh Assembly Government's policies and how it uses its budget within its delegated authority.*

*The Assembly Library and Publications Service is part of the Welsh Assembly Government and its role is to:*

- *Support the decision-making, policy development, service delivery and compliance processes of the Assembly Government by making available an extensive range of information resources and providing a high quality advisory service on information and research matters.*
- *Provide and promote public access to Assembly publications and information assets in electronic and hard copy formats.*

- *Deliver an effective and customer-focused service for general telephone enquiries from the public through the Switchboard.*

*The library serves approximately 6,500 internal government officials, dispatches over 2,000 publications per month to external customer requests (in paper and electronic formats) and deals with over 25,000 enquiries each month. All of customer interaction (internal or external) can be in Welsh or English. “Iaith Pawb”, the Welsh Assembly Government’s National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales states:*

*“The Assembly Government wants Wales to be a truly bilingual nation: a country where people can choose to live their lives through the medium of either Welsh or English or both and where the presence of the two languages is a visible and audible source of pride and strength to us all.”*

*(Welsh Assembly Government, Iaith Pawb, 2003, pg. 11)*

*This presentation will cover the service management opportunities and challenges of bilingual working/service delivery.*

## **A brief introduction to the Welsh Assembly Government**

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratic body created in 1999 to take over the powers of the Welsh Office, the old government department, bringing real political power to Wales from Westminster, London.

“With devolution, our destiny as regards health, wealth, education, the environment, and the domestic agenda more widely, is increasingly in our own hands.”

(Wales: a better country, Welsh Assembly Government, 2004).

The Government of Wales Act, 2006 defined the legal separation between the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales which has been in effect from 25 May 2007 when the First Minister was appointed. The relationship between the two is now similar to the UK Government’s relationship with the Houses of Parliament. It will be the job of the Welsh Assembly Government to govern Wales, while the National Assembly for Wales will make laws (“Measures”), and scrutinise the Welsh Assembly Government’s policies and how it uses its budget.

The Welsh Assembly Government is the devolved government of Wales. It is made up of the First Minister, the Counsel General, Welsh Ministers and Deputy Welsh Ministers. It is the role of the Welsh Assembly Government to make decisions, develop policy and propose Welsh Laws (known as Assembly Measures).

### **The Assembly Library and Publication Service**

The Assembly Library and Publications Service is part of the Welsh Assembly Government and its role is to:

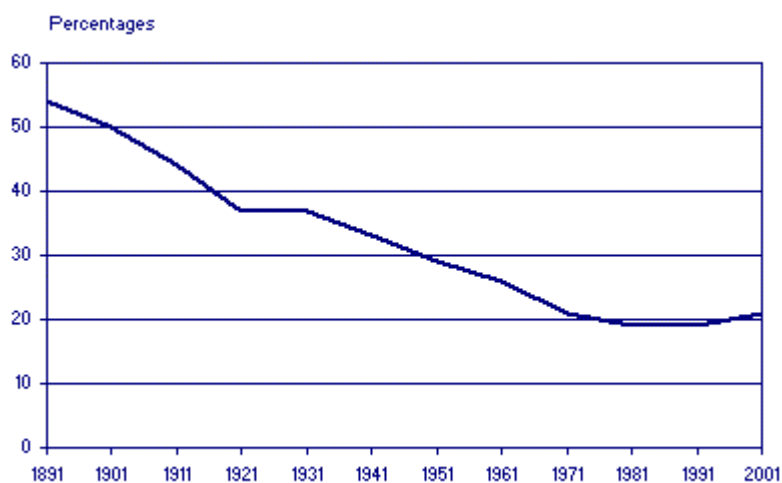
- Support the decision-making, policy development, service delivery and compliance processes of the Assembly Government by making available an extensive range of information resources and providing a high quality advisory service on information and research matters.
- Provide and promote public access to Assembly publications and information assets in electronic and hard copy formats.
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### **Background on the Welsh Language**

Welsh is a Celtic language related to Cornish and Breton which has, within the United Kingdom a legal status defined by the Welsh Language Act, 1993 and the Government of Wales Acts 1998 and 2006. The Government is planning to enhance further the legislative framework on the Welsh Language.

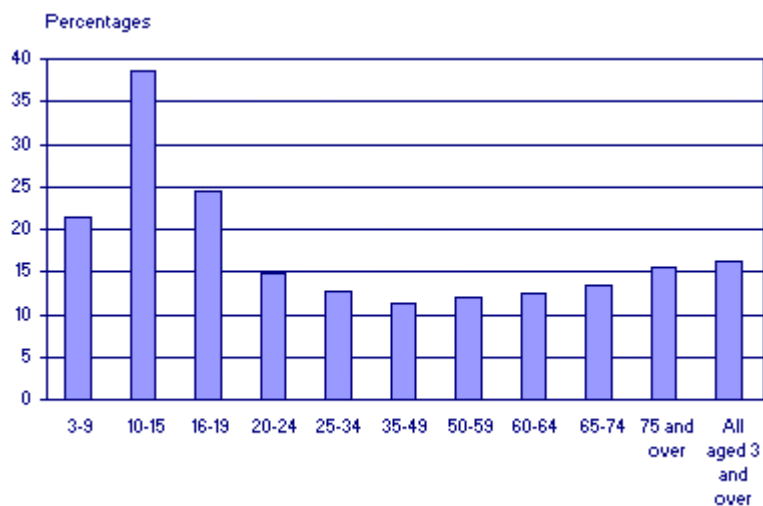
The 2001 Census, published in 2003, records that 20.8% of the population of Wales said they could speak Welsh, which indicates that the measured trend for a decline in Welsh language use is slowly reversing:



**Proportion of people aged 3 and over able to speak Welsh**

(Source: Office of National Statistics (January 2004) **Welsh Language: Wales its people** <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=447&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=374>)

Importantly one of the areas for increasing numbers of Welsh speakers is in children and young people, with a 13.4 percentage point increase between 1991 and 2001. With wider access to Welsh language schools, media and entertainment many children and young people interact in all levels of their lives in the Welsh language.



**Ability to speak, read and write Welsh: by age, April 2001**

(Source: Office of National Statistics (January 2004) **Welsh Language: Wales its people** <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=447&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=374>)

When comparing the numbers of Welsh speakers in different geographical areas there are marked divides. In Butetown, part of the capital city Cardiff, 3.2% of the population responded that they could speak Welsh, whereas in Caernarfon in the North West of Wales 88% declared themselves Welsh speakers

(Source: Welsh Language Board (2007) <http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/cynnwys.php?plD=90&langID=2>)

## **The Welsh Language Act and the Library & Publications Service**

The central aspect for the Library & Publications Service in Welsh Language Act 1993 is the specification that all public bodies have a duty to treat Welsh and English on an equal basis when providing services to the public in Wales. This means that external customers can expect a consistent level of service (including access to information in either language and response time) regardless of which language they use to communicate with us. “Iaith Pawb” (translated = “Everyone’s language”) (2003) the Welsh Assembly Government’s National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales states:

*“The Assembly Government wants Wales to be a truly bilingual nation: a country where people can choose to live their lives through the medium of either Welsh or English or both and where the presence of the two languages is a visible and audible source of pride and strength to us all.”*  
(Welsh Assembly Government, Iaith Pawb, 2003, pg. 11)

For internal library customers both Welsh and English are official working languages of the Welsh Assembly Government. Encouraging bilingualism in the workplace is a key element of the vision of “Iaith Pawb”. The Assembly Government also addresses the need to increase the bilingual capacity of the organisation through vocational training, recruitment and a bilingual skills strategy. The Assembly Library and Publications service recognises that in the services they provide to internal colleagues they should increasingly look for ways to provide services to colleagues in Welsh and/or English.

## **Service management opportunities and challenges of bilingual working**

For the Assembly Library and Publications Service the most significant element in leading and managing bilingual service delivery is to acknowledge that the service is enhanced rather than diluted when they communicate with customers using the language of their choice. Priority is always given to services to external customers as expected service levels are clearly stated within the Welsh Language Act and the vision of “Iaith Pawb”.

The service aims to have Welsh speaking enquiry staff available from 9am to 5pm, from any, not necessarily all, of the 3 service points. The logistics of this means that:

- some enquirers are transferred to Welsh speaking colleagues the initial responder is not confident in their language skills,
- the team can offer the same level of service to internal and external customers at no additional cost,
- desk rotas have to be carefully managed to ensure coverage is sufficient, and holiday leave checked across the service points,

All Welsh speaking staff, including those who do not usually work on front line service points, understand that they are expected to assist when necessary, particularly when unexpected circumstances occur (e.g. severe weather closing one of the sites where a service point is located). This requires the managers

within the Library and Publications service to give careful consideration to avoid burdening staff with extra work, or expecting them to work as translators.

### **Service management challenge: recruitment of bilingual staff**

In their research study into bilingualism and library services Winston and Walstad (2006, pp.404) indicated that there is a need for further research to consider recruitment theory, bilingual circumstances and the local population served by the libraries. The Assembly Library & Publications Service's "local population served" covers the whole of Wales, from the nearby community in Bute Town where 3.2% of the population responded that they could speak Welsh to Caernarfon in the North West of Wales where 88% declared themselves Welsh speakers.

Winston and Walstad (2006, pp.397) also cite the work of Alire and Archibeque (1998, pp. 143–144) who in their study into serving Latino communities provide recruitment guidelines for individual organisations, which include well-written job descriptions, effective advertising, and long-term plans for in-house cultivation of paraprofessional staff through financial assistance toward the MLIS degree.

One challenge for the service is that the three current service points, and therefore immediate local population for potential interest in posts, are based near to the Bute Town not Caernarfon!

To mitigate the risks of having insufficient Welsh language skills within the team the Library and Publications service has implemented the following recruitment strategies, in line with our Human Resources guidance, which mirror the guidelines suggested by Alire and Archibeque (1998). This includes:

- the routine inclusion of Welsh language skills in all new job descriptions for external facing front line staff. These range from indicating that skills are desirable through to specifying that Welsh language skills are an essential part of the role,
- all temporary staff recruited to cover service points are now required to have conversational Welsh skills and
- the funding of a bilingual Library Assistant in her distance learning MSc in Information Management, on a course where she can study in the Welsh language.

Through this strategy the service has increased their complement of front line Welsh speakers from 7 individuals to 11, almost on third of our entire team.

### **Service management challenges: staff training in Welsh language**

The Assembly Government has a range of training courses for beginner and advanced Welsh learners or improvers. Any Library and Publications staff who want to participate are released to attend these sessions. However the time that staff need to attend these courses can be one of the most difficult areas to manage, both in keeping service points open and in giving consideration not to burden staff with additional work who are not attending courses.

In 2002 all librarians attended one half-day session per week, reducing the face-to-face professional librarian presence by the equivalent of 1 full time member of staff. In addition to these routine absences any holiday leave, sickness absence or requirement of staff to be away from service points left us vulnerable to being unable to deliver appropriate service levels in either language. The training sessions were seen as a requirement rather than an individual's choice. The management team decided to actively review each librarian's personal learning plan to establish their preferred learning method and the demands for their services in the Welsh language. The balanced approach taken resulted in:

- one team member attending a summer school for 6 weeks to allow a concentrated level of study,
- the procurement of CDs, easy read novels in Welsh and targeted guides including "Business Welsh" for self directed learning,
- staff up take of Saturday "conversation days" where they could practice their new/improved skills,
- the achievement of an A-Level by one team member,
- attendance at a higher level course for 2 hours per week aimed at business use and
- some staff continued with the half day sessions.

By focusing on the individuals learning needs rather than a "one size fits all approach" the number of formal hours away from the service points has reduced, but the quality and appropriateness of the learning opportunity has increased.

### **Service management opportunity: Electronic service delivery**

The management team has recognised that the increasing number of children and young people who speak Welsh provides an opportunity for imbedding Welsh language functionality in all the Library and Publications internet and email enquiry services.

By incorporating the concept of having an equal, high quality service for enquirers in either language they have been able to implement working practices that make the most of the Welsh language skills of the team during the creation of electronic methods of service delivery. This avoids any potential costly reworking or adoption of inappropriate technology. The Welsh and English language elements of the service internet presence have been developed in tandem, including the online publications catalogue and Frequently Asked Questions service.

One particular benefit they have recognised with the increased potential for e-enquiries being delivered in Welsh is the simplicity of being able to "assign" requests for information as appropriate. Welsh language publication requests can be auctioned by a member of staff who is confident in dealing with the request, and the management team can monitor to ensure that responses are as prompt and timely across the service. The management team can also monitor to ensure that staff with high levels of Welsh language skills are not being burdened with too many requests based on their language skills.

### **Service management opportunity: Welsh language telephone enquiry lines**

Additionally a simple step to make the best use of Welsh language skills capacity in the team has been the introduction of a Welsh language enquiry line (0845 010 4400). This means that Welsh speaking staff can pick up these calls and respond immediately in Welsh. The service responds to calls to the other enquiry line (0845 010 3300) bilingually as the Welsh number has not been in market place for a significant period of time, but they anticipate being able to respond to this line in English only once metrics indicate that the use of the Welsh enquiry line corresponds to the anticipated number of Welsh language calls.

### **Service management challenges and opportunities for new service points**

The Welsh Assembly Government is implementing a Location Strategy, to locate Assembly Government buildings outside the capital, to be more accessible to the people of Wales. New centres are being proposed to support the Assembly Government's objective of improving service delivery to the people of Wales.

The Strategy provides an opportunity to develop internal bilingual working in the new centres. This will be achieved by embedding bilingual working practices, giving staff the ICT tools to enable bilingual working, providing training and mentoring in language skills and establishing a culture that normalises bilingualism.

The Library and Publications Service has been identified as potentially contributing to two service points for internal and external customers within the new offices. The Library and Publications Service is confident that their track record in bilingual working and service delivery has influenced their inclusion in this important and exciting opportunity for enhanced service delivery.

### **Conclusion: bilingual service delivery, once you overcome challenges is “twice as nice”**

Delivering services bilingually can be challenging, particularly in the areas of recruitment and staff training. However once these challenges are overcome and the opportunities of ICT to enable bilingual service delivery are adopted the overall service is enhanced.

Staff were recently asked to complete the following sentence:

*“I think that offering services in Welsh and English means that the Assembly Library and Publications is.....”*

responses included:

- showing that customers needs are considered, respected and accommodated,
- leading the way with valuing all its customers and working bilingually,
- fulfilling the spirit of the Welsh Language Act; valuing Welsh culture and language; supporting staff across Wales (who may prefer to dialogue in Welsh) and being an exemplar employer and public service body - but being mindful not to potentially dilute an already stretched service,



- contributing to ensuring the equal status of the two languages of Wales,
- responding positively to a need in Wales for customers to be served in the language they feel most comfortable with,
- able to offer a high standard of service to all people within Wales Meeting its commitment to serving the People of Wales and
- leading the Assembly into a better "customer friendly" environment.

Whilst this is not an objective review of staff perceptions, the purely positive, but pragmatic responses, clarify that the overall view of staff is that delivering services bilingually doesn't just help us comply with legal requirements, instead it's about delivering better customer services, i.e. we are "twice as nice".

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