



Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

Effective practice case study

Ofcom public events

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When face-to-face meetings were prohibited under measures to stop the spread of Covid-19, Ofcom began to hold online events. The broadcasting and communications regulator, which operates across the UK, has conducted the following bilingual virtual events during the period:

- Its first virtual webinar, '[Unlocking Connectivity in Rural Wales](#)', part of the Royal Welsh Show's online offering in July 2020;
- the [Small Screen: Big Debate](#) event in November 2020; and its
- [Ofcom Annual Plan](#) event in February 2021.

Background

There were technical challenges at first as Microsoft Teams, its recognised video-conferencing provider, did not offer an adequate simultaneous translation facility, so its IT department had to approve the use of Zoom for events. Following these events, Ofcom arranged a virtual event across the UK at the end of September 2021, '[All In: Diversity in Broadcasting](#)'. Ofcom had appointed the broadcasting events producers, ITN Productions, to undertake the technical work and its systems were adapted for the S4C session.¹



¹ Photo: The event's host, Dekan Apajee, in the studio with the bilingual branding visible throughout the day. The sessions can be viewed again [by registering on the microsite](#).

The work undertaken

Although Ofcom had an established procedure for conducting large-scale bilingual events, preparation was needed for the latest event. For the 'Medru Hansh' session, several meetings and infusion sessions were conducted with the central events department in London and the ITN production crew to ensure that staff outside Wales understood the requirements of the standards when arranging a session through the medium of Welsh. The external simultaneous translator was also present in the meetings and the practice session before the Diversity event to ensure that the technology was fit-for-purpose.

To ensure that it was possible to use Welsh in the different presentations and sessions, arrangements were made for the head of the translation company appointed to be present throughout the event and available to provide simultaneous translation in the virtual event. They also provided the translations for the live subtitles.

It was the events crew in London that came to the Wales office staff with the plan to include S4C in the event as the Standards and Audience Protection department staff in London had developed a good relationship with the Medru Hansh crew and suggested their inclusion.

Results to date

The Ofcom Standards and Audience Protection department in London wishes to further develop the relationship with Hansh following the event and create networks between similar organisations.

Ofcom is eager to increase engagement with Welsh speakers and highlight that audiences in Wales can contribute and listen to its events in Welsh without barriers. With an S4C session part of the virtual event across the UK, a wider platform was given to the Welsh language and S4C in diversity in broadcasting. Prominent leaders from several diversity and inclusion areas in broadcasting were also taking part from outside the UK, and the Welsh language and a Welsh language channel were given prominence amongst them.

According to Ofcom, there was a "great" response from a number of Events staff and organisers from the Broadcasting Standards department regarding the work of the Ofcom Wales office in Welsh. A [supportive tweet from S4C](#) was posted following the event and positive feedback was received from external stakeholders who attended the 'All In' event regarding the Welsh language session:

"The event worked brilliantly. Including more than one language was very good, that is Welsh, with BSL too."

How can this work for other organisations?

For an event on this scale, thorough planning was needed and ensuring that the invites, branding, materials, and website all met the requirements of the standards as a minimum. Ofcom ensured that the Welsh language was included naturally in the event

and included Welsh speakers when welcoming, presenting, or chairing discussions as part of event activities (virtual or face-to-face). It's necessary to ensure that the required technical resources are available for simultaneous translation and that they have been tested, according to Ofcom.

It said that providing subtitles in a live event for the first time was quite a challenge. And although it was noted that there were no errors when transcribing the Welsh, there was some delay between the translator's audio dialogue and the text from the subtitles reaching the screen.

With virtual events, Ofcom's advice is to persevere when coming across technical difficulties as they are possible to solve with effort. It was a successful bilingual event as the Welsh language was considered from the very outset.

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The Welsh Language Commissioner's View

As working practices change fundamentally, ensuring that it is possible to conduct virtual events (rather than face-to-face ones) is a good way of saving time and travel costs.

Although the Commissioner acknowledges that not all video-conferencing systems can currently support bilingual meetings fully, it is important to remember that there are systems which enable attendees to choose whether they listen to the meeting in the original language or listen to a translation through a different channel.²

Like a number of organisations who have had to operate in alternative ways during the pandemic, Ofcom has shown that it is possible to conduct large virtual events successfully without limiting Welsh language provision, and has highlighted to the attendees that they are welcome to use Welsh if they wish.

² [Holding bilingual video meetings](#)