



Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

# Recruiting Welsh speakers

## Improving ways of advertising and applying for jobs in order to recruit more Welsh speakers

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As it was facing a shortage of Welsh-speaking staff, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) conducted an exercise to increase the number of Welsh speakers applying for posts.

### BACKGROUND

DWP, which is supported by 13 agencies and public bodies, is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy, and administers the State Pension and a range of working age, disability and ill health benefits for over 22 million claimants and customers.

In its Welsh Language Scheme, DWP has committed to supporting the use of the Welsh language. Its practice is to ensure that all of the services that it provides to the public in Wales are available in Welsh. To achieve this, the department needs to employ enough Welsh-speaking members of staff throughout Wales.

Previous recruitment exercises to appoint Welsh speakers had met with varying degrees of success. DWP needed to look at ways of increasing the number of applications, but first it needed to understand whether there were any barriers or specific factors that were affecting people with regard to making an application.

Problems in this area were highlighted by the Department's annual Welsh language audit. In addition, Universal Credit was about to be introduced in Wales, which could lead to a large increase in the number of customers. DWP therefore needed to ensure that it had enough resources throughout Wales to respond to this demand. The anticipated process of recruiting work coaches to Jobcentre Plus (which is part of DWP) also highlighted the need to do things differently.

## ACTIONS TAKEN

Senior managers in Wales commissioned a task and finish group to investigate the problems and the solutions, and to consider the anticipated recruitment exercises and other exercises that would take place in the future. To ensure the success of the task and finish group, the group was led by the manager of the Welsh Language Unit, but also included members from different parts of DWP throughout Wales, as well as a Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) who speaks Welsh.

Other initiatives were put in place which contributed to the change: for example, a 'Welsh confident' group was established for Universal Credit, in order to understand what needs to be done so that DWP is able to provide a high-quality and effective Welsh-language service. It considered where its officers were located, and identified any gaps; and it looked at what could be done to help current members of staff to improve their Welsh language skills and to improve their confidence in using Welsh in the workplace, and so on. It also looked at previous recruitment strategies and policies.

DWP notes that having the HRBP as a member was essential in order to expand the options that were available to it and in allowing the group's conclusions to be assessed before being presented to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The fact that the group was sponsored / commissioned by senior managers was also helpful.

As the DWP uses the Civil Service Recruitment website to advertise its job vacancies, it needed to consult in relation to any changes the group wanted to make, which Civil Service Recruitment would supply. The group also looked at the guidance available on the Welsh Language Commissioner's website, as well as recent examples of other bodies' good practice in recruiting Welsh speakers.

The task and finish group split into two sub-groups in order to identify the relevant issues independently (including barriers to success) and possible solutions. The groups worked closely together (delegating responsibilities for individuals, where necessary), and reported back to the main group to prepare a final report and recommendations to be submitted to the Senior Leadership Team.

This work found that the recruitment process put people off and could be confusing, for example with regard to which language to use to fill in the application. Issues were also found in relation to the standard of Welsh (especially written Welsh) that was required in order to apply, and when working for DWP. Similar issues were seen in the language used in its adverts. It was also found that a perception of a lack of support when applying, and when working for DWP, could put some people off.

## IMPROVEMENTS AND ADVANTAGES

The following actions were recommended as a result of the exercise:

- Rewriting the information for applicants in order to clarify the general recruitment process, and ensuring that applicants are aware that most of DWP's work with regard to the Welsh language involves spoken, rather than written, Welsh;
- Identifying social media and other potential promotion partners, attaching the advert to the Welsh-language social media campaign, and considering moving away from the current advertising arrangements if the associated problems continue;
- Considering the standard of Welsh needed in DWP's job vacancies; should it be less formal, i.e. "Cymraeg Clir [Plain Welsh]"? Consider including a self-assessment for the applicant (e.g. level/confidence in relation to spoken/written Welsh, on a scale of 1 to 5);
- Highlighting the support available to DWP's employees to develop their Welsh language skills through training and mentoring;
- Ensuring strategic awareness of where the needs are / will be;
- Making the most of the bilingual element of DWP's workforce, noting in relation to each job vacancy that the Welsh language is desirable, and asking about Welsh-language skills in relation to job vacancies in English.

In addition, the work coaches ensured that their customers were informed about job vacancies and helped them through the process of making an application.

The Senior Leadership Team accepted the findings, and there has been a positive impact on the two 'Welsh' job vacancies that have been advertised by the DWP since then.

DWP noted that the information for applicants is clearer, that there is more supplementary information in Welsh, that external advertisements have been used, and that there has been an improvement in strategic awareness.

DWP also noted that there has been greater interest in the recruitment exercises, and more applications, despite the fact that the exercises have taken place in an increasingly competitive labour market.

DWP now has a number of new work coaches who speak Welsh, in locations where there was previously a shortage.

Senior leaders have responded positively, and a greater awareness of the need for a bilingual workforce can be seen in other development plans (the people group, the 'Welsh confident' group for Universal Credit).

## HOW CAN THIS WORK FOR OTHER ORGANISATIONS?

These are the factors DWP thought could be transferred to other organisations:

- Using digital channels (advertising on social media and on Welsh-language jobs websites);
- Looking for good practice in the labour market (providing good job descriptions);
- Using experience when researching practices and when developing and recommending them;
- Ensuring that the process follows the organisation's recruitment practices and that it is sponsored and approved by senior leaders.

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## THE COMMISSIONER'S VIEW

By considering proactively and thoroughly the ways in which it could recruit more Welsh speakers to its workforce in order to meet the demand for Welsh-language services, and by finding effective solutions to the previous shortage of Welsh speakers, DWP has shown its commitment to its Welsh Language Scheme as well as contributing towards ensuring that the principles in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 are realised for the citizens of Wales. Not only are its work and findings useful in maintaining its bilingual workforce and providing Welsh-language services, they provide information and examples for other organisations to emulate and implement in their own particular context.