



Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

A self-assessment process to measure compliance with Welsh language standards

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Background

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership is an organisation that provides a wide range of professional, technical, and administrative services for the health sector. The Partnership is hosted by Velindre University NHS Trust and has been implementing in accordance with the Welsh language standards since 2019.

Over the past few years, the Commissioner has called on organisations to improve their self-regulation arrangements in the context of the Welsh language. The Commissioner emphasised the need for organisations to have robust arrangements in place to monitor and verify their services and carry out continuous improvement processes for compliance with Welsh language standards.

What prompted the change?

Historically, the Partnership used to gather information about compliance by holding annual meetings with each service team. It was seen, however, that these arrangements were not sufficient in order to obtain a clear picture of the compliance of all departments across the organisation. Better arrangements were needed to ensure internal responsibility and accountability for implementing the standards in each department individually, paying particular attention to overseeing compliance.

The old practice of holding annual meetings with each service team was insufficient and somewhat burdensome in terms of resources and the responsible officer's time. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, and the additional pressure placed on bodies within the health sector at the time, it was recognised that a more thorough and consistent process was needed to gather the required information.

The Partnership set out to adopt a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to gathering evidence on compliance with standards. A self-assessment questionnaire was developed for each individual service team needs to complete. This has enabled the Partnership to better measure compliance with standards across the organisation and ensure that specific evidence and data is collected by each team at its level of

compliance. This has also facilitated the process of gathering information and reporting on compliance annually as required under the standards.

The self-assessment questionnaires are now shared with heads of service at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the financial year. Each department is given eight weeks to complete and submit the questionnaires. Following that, the Welsh Language Services Manager collects the data from the questionnaires to prepare a more detailed and accurate report on the organisation's performance and compliance with the Welsh language standards.

What steps had to be taken to make the change?

A series of strategic steps were taken to lay the groundwork for change.

Firstly, discussions with the Senior Management Team were necessary to ensure that information regarding the new monitoring arrangements was shared with all the departments. Communication with the staff through Senior Management ensured a high status to the work and confirmed that there was support and authority from the top of the organisation.

Following this, direct meetings were held with the heads of each service to introduce the changes and ensure a clear understanding of the expectations associated with the new process.

Furthermore, a targeted communication approach was adopted, specifically reaching out to heads of service before the start of the fourth quarter and through periodic reminders. The aim was to reinforce the message by reminding and motivating them to take timely action to implement and complete the self-assessment questionnaire within the set time frame.

What are the advantages?

The self-assessment questionnaire has allowed the Partnership to gather detailed evidence about the way in which each department in the organisation implements the requirements of the standards in their areas of work.

The Partnership has recognised that the content of these questionnaires is a solid infrastructure to hold constructive discussions with their heads of services, create action plans in order to improve practices and share good practices. It has also enabled the organisation to identify and challenge conventional and dated procedures in order to make further improvements.

The background information in the questionnaire also ensures that heads of services interpret the standards correctly, and therefore, formulate services, operations and policies based on the requirements of the standards.

In addition, the reporting process has placed more responsibility on staff to document compliance in detail and provide reliable evidence to justify their answers regarding their performance against the standards.

By establishing a consistent way of gathering information about compliance, this has enabled teams to easily compare their actions and performance with other teams in the organisation. This has led to opportunities for teams to share and adopt best practices for overcoming common barriers to providing services in Welsh as well as improving consistency in those services.

What advice would you give to another organisation considering adopting a similar method?

If an organisation is trying to change its current practice, the Partnership notes that it would be wise to follow these key pieces of advice:

- Start by securing the approval and support of the Senior Management Team, as their support is essential for organisational alignment and a smooth transition from one system to another.
- Clearly state the purpose of the procedure. This not only acts as a road map for implementation but also enables the organisation to measure the success of the procedure in due course.
- Giving timely warning about the upcoming changes to enable individuals within the organisation to prepare for the change.
- Emphasise the mandatory nature of the new system to ensure staff commitment to the new system.
- Promote a culture that welcomes challenges and encourages the exploration of different or better service methods. Empowering individuals to propose innovative ideas, fostering a mindset of continuous improvement.
- Establish a solid infrastructure for ongoing discussions and put action plans in place.

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Welsh Language Commissioner's comments

The Welsh Language Commissioner's Regulatory Framework emphasises that organisations need to take responsibility for ensuring that they comply as they should with Welsh language standards. That is, they must self-regulate effectively.

One way to ensure this is to adopt a robust internal monitoring framework in order to gather information about compliance, and to ensure that staff in all parts of the organisation take responsibility for the Welsh language.

The Partnership has put a robust self-regulation process in place within the organisation which ensures that the Welsh language is the responsibilities of every department in the organisation. It motivates staff to make positive changes to improve the Welsh provision offered to the Service users in Wales.