



Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

# Bilingual services at reception areas

## Ensuring a consistent and good quality bilingual service within reception areas

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The Welsh Government has succeeded in improving and aligning bilingual services within its reception areas by placing one facilities management contract for the entire estate.

### BACKGROUND

The Welsh Government has experienced difficulties in trying to appoint bilingual staff to the Government's main reception area at Cathays Park, Cardiff in the past. Staff turnover was high, which in turn affected the ability to provide a consistent bilingual service of the highest quality.

There was inconsistency in the contracts of staff working at the reception area, with some on short term contracts and others working for an agency. The number of applicants who would apply for posts advertised with the Welsh language as essential was very low. It also seemed that it was difficult to keep staff with Welsh language skills in these posts, as they were being promoted to other roles within the organisation. This led to increasing costs, both in staff time involved in the recruitment process as well as the costs of employing agency staff.

Reception areas in other Government offices were also a mixture of Welsh Government staff on short term contracts, recruitment agency staff and various facilities contracts which meant that the provision was dispersed and inconsistent in terms of skills and quality.

It was decided to put one facilities management contract in place for the entire estate, and as a result there was an opportunity to ensure that the specification included clear terms for the contractor to provide bilingual reception services.

## **CONSIDERATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE WITHIN THE SPECIFICATION**

The business needs and practical requirements were clearly noted in the specification published for the new agreement, and the tender was awarded on this basis. When evaluating the tender applications, a particular emphasis was placed on the proposed business models offered and their method of recruiting for the roles where Welsh was an essential skill. Emphasis was also placed on the training offered to staff.

Due to the longevity of the new agreement, the successful company was expected to employ staff directly on permanent contracts. This was a way of reducing staff turnover, and ensuring consistency in terms of training, expectations and performance.

## **MONITORING THE AGREEMENT**

The levels of resources needed for the reception areas are reviewed regularly, and regular discussions are held with the contractor to ensure that staff have the appropriate skills to undertake the work. Discussions are also held when the need to fill vacancies arises.

The contractor is responsible for providing the appropriate training. All staff are given training on providing a high quality bilingual customer service, and some other members of staff who are part of the contract, such as security officers, have had basic Welsh language training as well as training in providing a bilingual customer service.

## **PROMOTING THE WELSH LANGUAGE SERVICE**

The Welsh Government has now started using Iaith Gwaith material to highlight the Welsh language service offered within the reception areas. The Iaith Gwaith logo is seen clearly throughout the reception areas and the word 'Croeso' (in Welsh only) has been placed along the desk in order to assure visitors that they are welcome to start their conversation in Welsh. The aim is to promote the service to Welsh speaking visitors, but also to highlight the language to non-Welsh speaking visitors.

## **IMPACT**

The Welsh Government can now be confident that the service provided at the reception area is consistent in terms of quality and bilingualism. Of course, this also meets the Welsh Government's statutory responsibilities under the Welsh language standards to provide a full Welsh language service within the reception area. The team has received positive feedback from service users on the bilingual service.

## TRANSFERABLE ASPECTS

The success of the scheme was dependent upon ensuring that the agreement's requirements and conditions were clear to both parties from the outset. This was done by ensuring full consideration of the Welsh language from the need to provide Welsh language services when producing the specification and when evaluating the tender applications.

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## THE COMMISSIONER'S VIEW

Workforce planning is one of the main challenges for organisations when providing reception and telephone services in Welsh, and it is good to see that organisations such as the Welsh Government are taking positive action to address this. Amongst public organisations, there is a general tendency to turn to private, voluntary and other public organisations to provide services on their behalf through contract. Public services procurement is a means of ensuring high quality services and the best value for the public pound. I believe that this case is a good example of how service procurement, being carefully planned, can lead to a better Welsh language service for the public.