



Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

TRIO WRITING

Design and create bilingual content that considers the Welsh language from the outset.

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Background

Although the Welsh Language Measure has led to an increase in Welsh language services available to the public, the use made of those services continues to be relatively low when considering the number of Welsh speakers who are likely to be using those services. We can therefore conclude that providing the service in Welsh alone is not enough to encourage their use.

Increasing the use of Welsh language services has been identified as one of Welsh Government's priorities within its Welsh language 2050 strategy. In addition, the Digital Service Standards for Wales, published in March 2022, emphasised the need to promote the use of the Welsh language as a core standard, highlighting the need to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh within digital public services. The Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) responded by reviewing and improving its process for designing Welsh and bilingual content.

Why was change necessary?

Feedback from Welsh speakers and users of Welsh language services shows they are of the opinion that Welsh language services are not as reliable, as understandable or as accessible as the English language services. As a result, Welsh speakers are more likely to turn to and use the English services, even though a Welsh version is available to them.

CDPS carried out research with service users at the Eisteddfod in 2022. From a sample of 144 Welsh speakers who used online services, 43% said that the Welsh language was 'unnatural' and therefore a barrier to using Welsh language services.

What needed to change?

The general practice by organisations, when producing and publishing materials bilingually, is to draft and design the content in English first and then translate it directly into Welsh. At times, the English content can be difficult to read and understand. This, in turn, makes the work of translation difficult and is likely to lead to misinterpretation or that translators having to spend valuable time asking colleagues about the meaning and context of the translation request. At worst, it means that there is no opportunity to refine and revise the English, meaning that the Welsh version (as an afterthought) will reflect the weaknesses of the English version.

Although much of the Welsh content is often correct, user feedback shows that one of the main obstacles when trying to use Welsh language services was the fact that the language was too formal and unnatural.

It was concluded that the user experience needed to be improved in order to encourage Welsh speakers to choose and use the Welsh language services. If we want to see more people opting to use Welsh language services, we need to ensure that the content that is published is easy to use and easy to understand.

It was decided that the Welsh language should be considered in all stages of content design rather than translating the final English material. The aim was to find a method of designing and preparing content that gave priority to the Welsh language within the design process, rather than considering it at the end. Content should be designed in Welsh and English at the same time to ensure that both languages are considered equally.

What is Trio Writing?

Trio Writing builds on the well-known technique of pair writing, which brings together a subject matter expert and a content designer to work on a single piece of work to create content together at the same time. Trio Writing adds a third person, namely the Welsh translator.

It is important to note that Trio Writing is not an alternative method of translation, but rather a method that introduces the key principle, which is collaboration to design better services in both languages. This means sharing responsibility for the accuracy, clarity, and usefulness of content between subject matter experts, content experts and the translator. Trio Writing can take place in person or remotely. In practice, the Welsh and English versions should be drafted at the same time by having two blank documents on screen or one document that uses a table/column to put the languages side by side.

When ready to start writing, the three individuals involved can organise and agree on the specific task for each of them. For example, the translator writes the Welsh translation based on the English version. At the same time, the English version may be improved based on the information learned while working on the Welsh version. The user researcher will be responsible for ensuring the content meets the needs of the project and the needs of the users. The content designer helps with structure, language, accessibility, and inclusivity.

How was Trio Writing implemented?

The Schools Essential Grant content was a successful piece of content that was trio written as part of a project to make it easier for people to access cost of living support. CDPS worked with local authorities and the Welsh Government to co-design bilingual content.

Research showed that too few people who were eligible for the grant actually applied because they did not have the information they needed. Some users said they could not use the services in Welsh and had no choice but to use the English version. The research with users enabled CDPS to better understand their needs and design content that met those needs.

Through collaboration with the local authorities, bilingual content was created that met the needs of users. The content was simple and easy to use, regardless of the user's language or cultural background. The content was tested with users in both languages, and positive feedback was received stating that the content produced was clear, natural and simple in both languages.

What training did staff require before implementing Trio Writing?

There was little training needed to implement Trio Writing within CDPS. At the start there was a need to define the process and structure within the pre-existing content workstreams. Other organisations who may want to implement the method in their own practice may need to familiarise themselves with how the process works and to practice it with a simple piece of work to begin with.

It is important to note that organisations should be aware of the principles of agile working and the concept of user-centred design (UCD), if they want to use Trio Writing in their work. An agile way of working is about coming together to find the best and most effective ways to complete a task that concentrates on ensuring a better experience for the user.

UCD plays a key role in Trio Writing as it is concerned with prioritising the needs of service users, namely in this case, users of Welsh language services. Everyone has a role to play and the content designers are just as important as the translator as they have the expertise and understanding of how best to create structure, clarity and consider accessibility needs.

Carrying out research with service users is also a highly effective method of learning and understanding what the needs of Welsh language service users are. Relevant research can help ensure that consumers' needs are met.

What are the advantages of Trio Writing?

Trio Writing is a new mindset, a different way working. Designing content in both languages from the start, is more efficient, saves time and results in better quality of content.

The benefits are that the translator understands the context of the content that needs to be written which leads to better content that is more accessible and inclusive. The needs of the user are met in both languages as the English is also often clearer and simpler as a result. The content is therefore better in both languages.

Designing content as a trio doesn't mean extra time or work. In fact, it reduces the unnecessary calls, emails and meetings required for changes and clarifications to the text or content. Traditional translation methods often require back and forth communication between the designer, leader and translator. Often the translator is isolated from the planning process and therefore the context might be unclear. There may also be errors in the final translation, leading to confusion for readers and the need to further modify the content later. Trio Writing saves time because of its collaborative and structured approach, and due to its efficient process, it can also save money.

What advice would you give an organisation who are thinking of adopting the Trio Writing method?

The most effective way to understand Trio Writing is to implement it in an organisation and try it out.

It is likely that certain manager will need to be influenced or persuaded to adopt this way of working. These could be:

- Translation managers and experts
- Policy leaders
- Service designers and managers.

Trio Writing works best when everyone involved works together, has clear goals and communicates effectively. It should be considered a relaxed process rather than a formal one as anything produced does not necessarily need to be a final draft, there may be other sessions to follow.

It may be necessary to challenge the attitude and methods of those who have never created content in this way before, to ensure that they understand the need to put the service users and their needs at the heart of the work.

Individuals involved in Trio Writing should have certain skills so that the process can work successfully and effectively. The skills should include:

- an understanding of agile ways of working and UCD,
- knowledge in the specific languages that are written,
- understanding of the principles of using plain language,
- expertise in content design,
- an understanding of user needs and a focus on inclusiveness and accessibility.

It is important to collect feedback after a Trio Writing session from those who participated as this could help improve the process so that it can be more successful next time.

Contact details

Organisation: Centre for Digital Public Services

Website: <https://digitalpublicservices.gov.wales/>

Contact Officer: Osian Jones (Osian.jones@gwasanaethaocyhoeddusdigidol.llyw.cymru)

Welsh Language Commissioner's Conclusion

The Welsh language belongs to us all and the people of Wales need to have confidence in the Welsh language services that are offered to them. It is essential that the services are easy to understand and use, and that the quality of the user's experience is completely equal in both languages. We will not see an increase in their use until that is realised.

Our research shows that the Welsh language services that are offered by public organisations continue to increase, and it is therefore important to ensure an increase in the use of those services. A new mindset is required to plan and think how to provide simple and easy to understand Welsh services that put the user in the middle. One of the great side effects of Trio Writing is that the exercise often sheds light on things that don't work well in English either – so every user is a winner!

I welcome all efforts to think innovatively about how to improve the Welsh language services available. It is clear that Trio Writing can contribute significantly to improving the standard and quality of public services, both in Welsh and English.