



Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

# Encouraging Welsh in the workplace

Children's Commissioner for Wales's [My Welsh Promise](#) initiative

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Staff working for the Children's Commissioner for Wales recently initiated an idea to support the use of the Welsh language within the organisation. '[My Welsh Promise](#)' was created and officially adopted as a means of maintaining the progress in the use of the Welsh language by fluent speakers and those learning Welsh.

For each of the four levels of proficiency in Welsh, there are four promises for staff to choose from and they may choose however many they like. The promises are actions or behaviours that enable the use of the Welsh language.

They are all positive actions, such as:

- 'Find an advanced or fluent learner buddy I am comfortable speaking with'.
- 'Be patient and understand if someone takes a while to respond or replies in English'.

In the spirit of the Welsh language (Wales) Measure 2011, the aim of the initiative is to promote and facilitate the Welsh language and to be inclusive, supportive and patient with all learners.

## Background

On 31 March 2021, there were 26 members of staff employed at the Commissioner's office; 9 described themselves as proficient in Welsh; 5 described themselves as having advanced skills in Welsh and 4 said they had intermediate level skills in Welsh. Having invested significant resources (time and funds) to support the Welsh language, the organisation has already seen increased confidence as a bilingual office as the language is a natural medium for communication between colleagues. A positive attitude towards the Welsh language already existed within the workplace culture and staff were keen to build on this and in particular, to provide peer support for learners.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, staff at the Children's Commissioner for Wales were required to work from home on their own as of March 2020, rather than from their office at Port Talbot. This had a detrimental effect on the opportunities that people had to speak Welsh with one another in an informal context.

The staff wellbeing group noted that fewer opportunities to speak Welsh at random posed a risk to the progress made to date in the use of the language. They were keen

to continue developing their confidence as a bilingual workplace which enables all staff and visitors to use their Welsh language skills.

### Work undertaken

'My Welsh Promise' was developed by the staff wellbeing group who had identified the gap and was approved by the management team in early 2021. The promises made have been included within the ongoing professional development discussions of all staff during appraisal meetings since April of the same year.

The initiative hasn't incurred any additional costs or training requirements.

### Results to date

As a new initiative, a longer period will be required before a detailed assessment can be made but it is well-rooted. They report the following results:

- wider use of the Welsh language at internal meetings;
- a slight increase in the number of people attending advanced Welsh lessons;
- pairing fluent speakers and learners has started to work well;
- one semi-fluent learner has begun to use their Welsh at internal and external meetings with much greater confidence.

They also report how the workforce has been universally positive about the initiative.

### How can this work for other organisations?

The Children's Commissioner for Wales believes that the most successful wellbeing and people management initiatives are those that are proudly owned and driven from the staff team as opposed to those being cascaded down by management team.

The initiative can be adopted as it is or adapted to make it more ambitious and have a wider choice of promises. The promises can also be ranked according to how much of a commitment they are and even have an annual event where people are nominated and rewarded based on their successes.

Gaining workforce enthusiasm and consulting widely appears to be key to the success as well as securing approval and commitment from the management team to sustain momentum and show that they also participate. However, it is possible for larger organisations to offer My Welsh Promise within one or more departments or to adapt the promises depending on the nature of the work.

### Contact details

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## The Welsh Language Commissioner's opinion

An initiative such as this should form a core part of an organisation's policy on the internal use of Welsh with a view to promote and facilitate the use of the language under that standard's requirements (standard 94 of the [Welsh Language Standards \(No. 2\) Regulations 2016](#)).

The fact that the Children's Commissioner herself, Sally Holland, (along with other officers) has managed to become a fluent Welsh speaker whilst fulfilling a public role will certainly be an inspiration to the rest of her colleagues.

Welsh language use surveys in the past have shown that situations need to be facilitated at times so that people feel comfortable to use the language and incentivised to improve their skills and be provided with opportunities to practise their Welsh. This is an effective example of that in the workplace.