

WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Open University (OU)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In common with other higher education providers in Wales, The Open University (OU) was issued a compliance notice by the Welsh Language Commissioner on 29 September 2017. Although the OU operates on a semi-devolved basis (The Open University in Wales), the compliance notice and subsequent standards apply to the OU as a single entity. The standards themselves however apply to staff, students and members of the public based in Wales.

This report for the 2019/20 financial year is the third to be produced by the OU in accordance with standard 166, 172 and 178. During the latter half of this period, public life in Wales was defined by the coronavirus pandemic. The Open University, like all universities and other public bodies, has been required to adapt many ways of working so that services can continue while minimising risk to the public and complying with Welsh Government guidelines.

This has impacted on how the OU has ensured compliance with the standards. For example, as face-to-face business such as public events and job interviews have moved online, we worked closely with simultaneous translators to build work-arounds. This has allowed members of the public to use Welsh on live video in situations where they would have chosen to do so in person.

Our Cardiff office has closed on two separate occasions following Welsh Government lockdowns, and we have maintained a skeleton staff in-between. The office has remained closed to visitors throughout the whole period, which has limited face-to-face enquiries through the medium of Welsh, eg in reception. Many of our student support staff have been supported to work from home so that they can continue to answer phone calls and emails from students and prospective students in Welsh.

However, as a distance learning provider which conducts most of its teaching online, the OU has been able to respond relatively well to the challenges of posed by the pandemic. Our online teaching has continued, and we are supporting partners to promote learning opportunities to stakeholders. The Welsh Government have promoted our free bilingual OpenLearn courses to members of the public on its

Working Wales website. We are also part of sector-wide bid, working with y Coleg Cymraeg, to develop Welsh-medium resources to support blended learning.

2. GOVERNANCE

Compliance with the Welsh language standards during 2019-20 continued to be coordinated by the Welsh language standards steering group. Although the group was due to meet every six months, the 2020 spring meeting did not take place due to the impact of the pandemic on university business.

The OU continues to work closely with Welsh-language consultants Ateb ensuring that expertise can be sought when dealing with potentially complex issues surrounding compliance. The OU in Wales' communications manager continues to lead on Welsh-language issues, providing advice to staff across the university.

Developments during 2019/20 included:

- providing Welsh language awareness sessions to faculty staff
- encouraging increased submission of assessments through the medium of Welsh across faculties
- facilitating an increase of interviews for staff and student vacancies through the medium of Welsh, supported by simultaneous translation over video
- using video software for live events, allowing attendees to contribute bilingually using chat functions

Looking ahead to 2020/21, the OU has recently set up a Welsh language standards oversight group. This group continues the work of the Welsh language standards steering group, which was established to ensure compliance ahead of standards imposition dates. The group will continue to meet every six months.

The group is chaired by OU in Wales director Louise Casella. Staff members from across the university have been appointed to the group to focus on the following areas:

- People's services
- Academic Services
- Governance
- Forms
- OU in Wales

- Students
- IT

3. COMPLIANCE

A. Service Delivery Standards

The following standards have been fully adopted by The Open University:

Standards	Imposition date
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 24A, 26A, 27, 27A, 27D, 29, 29A, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 40A, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53A, 53B, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 76A, 78, 79, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 90A, 93	1 April 2018
53, 55, 80, 81, 81A, 83, 84	1 October 2018

No complaints relating to service delivery standards were received during the reporting period.

Recent work to ensure best compliance with these standards includes:

- continuing to inform students of their right to receive written communication in Welsh via our studenthome platform
- increasing the number of translation companies used by the OU in Wales to deal with peak demand
- increasing the number of Welsh speaking staff on our student support helpline
- making students and the public aware of their rights to use Welsh language services through *Diwrnod Shwmae Sumai* and *Diwrnod Hawliau*
- increasing the number of video student case studies on the OU in Wales website.

B. Policy making standards

The following standards have been fully adopted by The Open University:

Standards	Imposition date
94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104	1 October 2018

No complaints relating to policy making standards were received during the reporting period.

The following work has continued since the imposition date

- The screening tool for assessing policies continues to be used, which helps consider any potential negative impacts on the Welsh language, and increased opportunities to use Welsh.
- Policies have been archived by staff, and the tool has been re-used as policies have been amended.

C. Operational standards

The following standards have been fully adopted by The Open University:

Standards	Imposition date
106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 119, 119A, 121, 122, 123, 123A, 125, 126, 127, 132, 134, 135, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 144A, 145, 145A, 146, 146A, 146B, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153	1 April 2018
105, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118	1 October 2018
111	1 April 2019

No complaints relating to operational standards were received during the reporting period.

WELSH LANGUAGE SKILLS – IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDARDS 134 AND 158

The OU has surveyed the Welsh language skills of its employees. The results of the survey, based on a **44%** completion rate, are shown in this table:

Welsh language listening skills		
	No.	%
No skills	34	39%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	13	15%
Able to understand basic enquiries in Welsh (Ble mae....? / Ga i siarad â....?)	15	17%
Able to understand a basic social conversation in Welsh	7	8%
Able to follow routine conversations involving work between fluent Welsh speakers	4	5%
Able to follow the majority of conversations involving work including group discussions	2	2%
Able to understand all conversations involving work	13	15%
Welsh language reading skills		
No skills	31	35%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	11	13%
Able to read basic words and phrases (e.g signs or short and simple notes)	24	27%
Able to read basic material involving work (slowly)	2	2%
Able to read routine material with a dictionary	3	3%
Able to read the majority of material in own work area	6	7%
Able to understand all material involving work	11	13%
Welsh language speaking skills		
No skills	37	42%

Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	13	15%
Able to answer simple enquiries (e.g greetings, (Ble mae....? / Ga i siarad â....?))	15	17%
Able to answer simple enquiries involving work	2	2%
Able to converse with someone else, with some hesitancy, regarding routine work issues	5	6%
Able to speak the language in the majority of situations using some English words	6	7%
Fluent – able to conduct a conversation and answer questions, for an extended period of time where necessary	10	11%
Welsh language writing skills		
No skills	38	43%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	11	13%
Able to write basic messages (Diolch am y llythyr, Dyma gopi o.....)	18	20%
Able to answer simple correspondence with assistance	1	1%
Able to draft routine text, with editing assistance	5	6%
Able to prepare the majority of written material, with some revision assistance	8	13%
Skilled – able to complete complex written work without the need for revision	6	7%

TRAINING – IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDARDS 135 AND 159

- In accordance with standard 135, we have made provisions to offer our staff the ability to undertake relevant training in Welsh, when the training in those areas are provided in English. During the reporting period, no staff member chose the Welsh option.

RECRUITING – IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDARD 145 AND 162

From 1 August 2018 to 1 August 2019, The OU recruited the following number of posts with specific language requirements to the OU in Wales:

- (i) Welsh language skills were essential – 1
- (ii) Welsh language skills needed to be learnt when appointed to the post – 0
- (iii) Welsh language skills were desirable – 29
- (iv) Welsh language skills were not necessary – 2

4. FOCUS ON THE COMING YEAR

Over the next 12 months, the OU will continue to look at better ways to ensure ongoing compliance with Welsh language standards, especially given the ongoing challenges presented by the covid pandemic. Organising increased public engagement on-line, whether through online public lectures or student open days has allowed us to reach more people and communities across Wales, and we should use this opportunity to enhance our conversations with Welsh speakers.

In our teaching, we continue to see a small number of students opting to submit assessed work in Welsh. More and more Welsh speakers are joining our nursing and social work degree schemes, and we have recently appointed a Welsh Language specific tutor for students of nursing. Despite challenges to the teaching profession, our new PGCE course is going from strength to strength and will be delivered through the medium of Welsh to future teachers who will enter our Welsh medium education system.

Our office in Cardiff remains closed to visitors and is only open to staff when government advice allows for this. We have agreed a new arrangement with Welsh language tutors to give Welsh lessons to staff online, replacing our hugely popular staff lessons which were given in our office on a weekly basis.

Student numbers in the OU across the UK and in Wales specifically continue to grow, and this is mirrored by an increase in new staff. A priority for the coming year will be to ensure that awareness training on the Welsh language standards and on the language in general is given to new appointees, so that we can maintain a good service to staff, students and members of the public who wish to use Welsh with us.