

MEETING	Language Committee
DATE	10 October 2022
TITLE	Overview of the Language Designations Project
PURPOSE	Present a summary of the project's work and the next steps.
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1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide background on the Language Designations project and a summary of the work that has taken place so far. In addition, there will be information about the work in progress and the next steps. This is done to ensure that all members of the Language Committee are aware of the project's work.

2 Background

- 2.1 In 2015 the Language Committee decided to look at the procedure for recording the language skills of staff, in preparation for the arrival of the Language Standards in 2016 and in an effort to get a better understanding of the exact skill level of staff, rather than just being able to speak Welsh or not.
- 2.2 In January 2016 a further decision was made to review the language requirements and conditions of the Council's jobs in order to set realistic requirements alongside the duties of the post. For example:
- **Teacher:** The requirements were kept at the highest level due to the nature of the job.
 - **Leisure Assistant:** The speaking and listening requirements were kept high to reflect the importance of these skills in the job but the writing requirements were reduced as a leisure assistant does not need to write reports, minutes etc.
- 2.3 In 2017 the second part of the project began, which was to record the language skills of staff and ensure that support was available to current members of staff either to maintain the standard of their Welsh skills or to meet the language requirements of their job if there was a gap.
- 2.4 We started by running a pilot with the Gwynedd Consultancy department at the end of 2017. This was partly due to the Department's needs, and also due to their desire to work together. One of the most important lessons learned from the pilot is the importance of meeting Department Heads and Managers, and including them in the process from the very beginning. In addition to that, the department and managers taking ownership of the work was vitally important to the success of the project.
- 2.5 A Project Board was established to keep track of the work. As the project required looking at jobs (assessing needs and the recruitment process), people (appointing and assessing skills) and training, it was decided that the Project Board would include representatives from different services who

would contribute towards these elements, e.g. the Human Resources service and the Support service.

3 Project overview

- 3.1 From the end of 2018, the implementation of the project began with the other main departments of the Council. This was done by contacting Department Heads and Managers.
- 3.2 In addition to the Council's main departments, work has also been done to collect language assessments and to develop the language skills of Byw'n lach staff. Although no specific effort has been made to implement the project with the organizations hosted by Gwynedd Council, e.g. North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent, North Wales Economic Ambition Board and GwE, they can also complete the language self-assessment questionnaire, and support is available to them on request. Work has also taken place to collect language assessments from School staff, which will receive further attention as a result of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.
- 3.3. In order to facilitate the work of gathering information about staff language skills, the language self-assessment questionnaire was developed and started to be used from 2019 onwards. The questionnaire asks an individual to score their ability to do a variety of tasks through the medium of Welsh. Based on the answers, the questionnaire provides a language level at the end. It is also an opportunity for staff to note their confidence in using the Welsh language, to note if there is anything the Council can do to assist them to use more Welsh in their work, and gives them the opportunity to note any need for training.

The questionnaire is located on the Council's Self-Service system, and a version on an external site is available for those who do not have access to the Self-Service system.

It is recognized that it's a challenge to ensure that some groups of frontline staff complete the language self-assessment questionnaire. In order to get an idea of their language skills, managers are asked to indicate whether the members of staff meet the job's language designations or not.

- 3.4 All types of support, including internal Gloywi laith courses, external learning courses, intensive courses, online courses and apps and websites, are continuously offered to staff to improve or maintain their Welsh skills.
- 3.5 In order to offer aftercare to training recipients, and to support speakers who lack confidence or who want to improve their Welsh through a method other than the classroom, the **Welsh Friends Scheme** was established in March 2019. This Scheme pairs a member of staff confident in their Welsh with a member of staff who wants to develop their language skills.

- 3.6 Together with staff from the Information Technology service, a system was developed in order to keep the information about staff's language skills. This system gives the ability to create various reports e.g. A report of individuals who do not have a language assessment, a report for one service only.
- 3.7 A process was established to ensure that departments regularly receive information about the language levels of their staff, the number who do not meet the language designations of their jobs and the number who have or are attending language training. Department Heads now receive a report every 3 or 6 months.

This will also be a means of ensuring the continuity of the work after the project has ended.

- 3.8 The internal Language Site was developed as a central place to share information about language training, about useful resources and about the project itself, including frequently asked questions and useful information for managers.
- 3.9 A Language Designation Forum was established which includes a representative from each of the Council's main departments. The Forum meets every 3 months and offers the opportunity to discuss any challenges that have arisen in relation to the Welsh language, to share good practice and to share information about new opportunities to develop language skills.
- 3.10 Here is the latest project data for the Council's main departments (*correct on 23 September 2022 and excluding Schools*):

Total staff of the Council's main departments: **3,936**
Number of staff who have completed the language self-assessment: **2,717 (69%)**
Number of staff who have received some form of language assessment: **2,945 (75%)**
Number of staff remaining without a language assessment: **991 (25%)**
Number of staff who meet the language designations of their jobs: **2,687 (91%)**
Number of staff who do not meet the language designations of their jobs: **258 (9%)**
Number of staff who are higher than the language designations of their job: **1,969 (72%)**

Since the start of the project in 2017 over **200** members of staff have attended language training, either to learn Welsh or to further develop their skills.

Of the 258 who do not meet the language designations of their jobs, **47** have received language training to date.

4 Next steps

- 4.1 During the Performance Monitoring meeting of the Corporate Support department in June 2022, it was decided that the formal project had come to an end and that it was transferring to be part of day-to-day work, but that does not mean that the work of assessing and supporting staff will come to an end.

- 4.2 The work of gathering information about staff language skills will continue, as well as the work of offering support to develop staff language skills.
- 4.3 Meetings will be organized with Department Heads in order to officially close the project, to update them on the latest developments and remind them of their responsibilities and the support available to staff.
- 4.4 As the assessment procedure has been established, the focus will now shift to look at the support and training that is offered to develop the language skills of the workforce. It will be necessary to prioritize frontline services to contact regarding language training and specific attention will be given to members of staff who do not currently meet the language designations of their jobs.

This may mean commissioning specific courses for members of the Council's staff.

- 4.5 There will be collaboration with the Education department in order to collect language assessments from School staff as part of the work of the Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan, which is operational from September 2022.
- 4.6 It will be necessary to ensure that adequate monitoring arrangements are in place, and that the individual departments understand their responsibilities in order to ensure the continuity of the project.

The Language Designation Forum will continue to meet to ensure this and we are intending to look at additional ways of supporting teams to maintain Welsh as their working language and to integrate learners.

5 What we seek from the Language Committee

- 5.1 We welcome comments or questions from the Language Committee on the work of the project as well as recommendations and suggestions for the next steps.