Welsh language standards annual report 2023-24

The Open University

February 2025

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1. Introduction

This report for the 2023/24 financial year is the seventh to be produced by The Open University (OU) in accordance with standard 166, 172 and 178.

The university continues to develop its systems to better meet the requirements of Welsh language users – whether they're staff, students or members of the public. During 2023-24, the OU developed a new recruitment portal for job applicants, which we hope will make our processes for advertising and appointing more efficient. The team developing this portal has been working closely with OU in Wales staff to ensure the site meets all requirements under the Welsh language standards. The portal is now live, and is fully functional in Welsh.

Our team of staff in Wales continue to take up the OU's offer to learn Welsh. In partnership with y Coleg Cymraeg, our staff team are able to access online Welsh lessons with Aberystwyth University during work hours, these lessons are available for all abilities. Lessons are delivered online, which means that we have now been able to extend this offer to associate lecturers, regardless of where they are in Wales.

We continue to look for increased opportunities for staff to use Welsh in work, both professionally and socially. During 2023-24, we established *Y Gorlan*, a community of practice for Welsh-speaking teaching and support staff at the OU. The community has provided a virtual space for staff to come together to share best practice, update on new developments eg language technology, and promote the use of Welsh throughout the organisation.

The OU in Wales continues to offer a wealth of free online learning through the medium of Welsh. To date, over 400 free courses and resources are available in Welsh on OpenLearn. The OU has also produced Welsh language podcast content as part of *Barod ar gyfer prifysgol* (University Ready)[1]:

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[1] Available at https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/barod-ar-gyfer-prifysgol/sgwrsio-am-brifysgol---podlediad-am-y-profiad-myfyrwyr-go-iawn

Although the OU's language of formal teaching is largely English, we continue to see a growth in Welsh medium teaching, particularly in vocational courses. Our PGCE course, taught in Welsh or English, continues to go from strength to strength, and the OU is now one of the largest Welsh medium PGCE providers in Wales. Via our Nursing Degrees, we are introducing the concept of the active offer for patients wishing to use Welsh. In our Social Work programme, 23% of students across have used Welsh at some point as part of their studies (eg workshops, emails to tutors, or submission of assignments).

During the year, the university delivered an action plan to develop internal Welsh language awareness training following a request by the Welsh Language Commissioner. This has included adding Welsh language awareness content to our mandatory equality course; and a new detailed 30-minute module for key staff. This means that all staff across the whole of the OU, wherever they are based, will have Welsh language awareness in their mandatory equality training. We will report on take-up of these courses in the next annual report.

2. Governance

The Director of the Open University in Wales continues to have a strategic role in promoting the use of the Welsh language across the university, and ensuring ongoing compliance with the Welsh language standards. Governance is led from the OU in Wales office and supported by the University Secretary's office with input into Welsh language oversight and compliance by colleagues across units, as required.

A Welsh language task and finish group was set up in 2022-23 to look specifically at developing use of Welsh in the university beyond the requirements of the standards.

The group aimed to identify issues and opportunities in teaching, learning, and assessment, explore solutions, evaluate feasibility, and ensure the student voice was considered. The group concluded its work in June 2024.

Priority recommendations and actions are:

- identify an academic lead for Welsh language
- improve Welsh language data capture for student registration
- improve data capture to record Welsh language skills of staff
- establish a sub-group to consider the student voice.

Further to this work, a Welsh language operational group has since been established to deliver and monitor the progress of the recommendations. This group brings together key staff across the university to address challenges and compliance issues so that they can be addressed systematically.

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

In October 2024, we met with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. They commended our strategic approach and endorsed the priorities identified by the Task and Finish group.

The Coleg hosts strategic meetings with universities in Wales twice a year. To date, the OU has not been included. However, we have agreed to change this and will now be included in the meetings.

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

Complaints received	Details	Solution
18 December 2023	A member of the public submitted a complaint that one of The Open University's OpenLearn Courses available on OpenLearn Wales was not also available in Welsh on OpenLearn Cymru.\n\nThey also believed that the OU's annual Welsh language report on the OU in Wales website was out of date.	The OU explained to the member of public that standard 88 requires the OU to make public learning opportunities available in Welsh, unless an assessment deemed that this should not happen. It was explained that the course in question was developed over 10 years ago, and was included on OpenLearn Wales as it is of Welsh interest. The OU in Wales' stance, otherwise, is to ensure that free courses are developed

| | | in Welsh unless there is a reason not to.

It was explained that the OU's annual report looked back on the previous annual year. Therefore, the report the complainant saw at the time was added in January 2023, and reported on 2021-22. They were assured that the next report for 2022-23 would be added in January 2024. |
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Recent work to ensure best compliance with these standards includes:

- creating a new community of practice for Welsh speaking staff to share ways of working and best practice
- recruiting more Welsh-speaking staff to our student recruitment and support team
- leading on the production of a bilingual podcast series *Barod ar gyfer y Brifysgol / University Ready,* which was produced alongside students and universities across Wales.

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 are recent developments to support policy making standards:

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- Consideration of Welsh language policy issues has been added to the OU's equality impact assessment guidance, both on a UK and OU in Wales level.
- These documents signpost to the revised screening tool for assessing policies, 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.

Recent work to ensure best compliance with these standards includes:

- developing a new, fully bilingual recruitment portal to ensure ongoing compliance with standards relating to staff recruitment
- creating a new assessment tool to advise recruiting managers on the Welsh language requirements of new roles
- creating a new checklist for recruiting managers to ensure that relevant Welsh language standards are adhered to during recruitment.

Welsh language skills – in accordance with standards 134 and 158

The OU in Wales has surveyed the Welsh language skills of employees working in Wales. The results of the survey, based on a 73% completion rate are as follows:

Welsh language listening skills	No.	%
No skills	52	34%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	18	12%
Able to understand basic enquiries in Welsh (Ble mae….? / Ga i siarad â….?)	33	22%
Able to understand a basic social conversation in Welsh	13	9%
Able to follow routine conversations involving work between fluent Welsh speakers	6	4%
Able to follow the majority of conversations involving work including group discussions	5	3%
Able to understand all conversations involving work	25	16%
Welsh language reading skills		
No skills	34%	34%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	12%	12%

Able to read basic words and phrases (e.g signs or short and simple notes)	22%	22%
Able to read basic material involving work (slowly)	9%	9%
Able to read routine material with a dictionary	4%	4%
Able to read the majority of material in own work area	3%	3%
Able to understand all material involving work	16%	16%
Welsh language speaking skills		
No skills	54	36%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	18	12%
Able to answer simple enquiries (e.g greetings, (Ble mae....? / Ga i siarad â....?)	41	27%
Able to answer simple enquiries involving work	5	3%
Able to converse with someone else, with some hesitancy, regarding routine work issues	5	3%
Able to speak the language in the majority of situations using some English words	7	5%
Fluent – able to conduct a conversation and answer questions, for an extended period of time where necessary	21	14%
Welsh language writing skills		
No skills	61	40%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	19	13%

Able to write basic messages (Diolch am y llythyr, Dyma gopi o.....)	34	22%
Able to answer simple correspondence with assistance	5	3%
Able to draft routine text, with editing assistance	8	5%
Able to prepare the majority of written material, with some revision assistance	9	6%
Skilled – able to complete complex written work without the need for revision	16	11%

The OU has also surveyed the Welsh language skills of associate lecturers identified as working in Wales, with a completion rate of 24%. This survey was optional.

Welsh language listening skills	No.	%
No skills	47	43%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	12	11%
Able to understand basic enquiries in Welsh (Ble mae....? / Ga i siarad â....?)	15	14%
Able to understand a basic social conversation in Welsh	9	8%
Able to follow routine conversations involving work between fluent Welsh speakers	5	5%

Able to follow the majority of conversations involving work including group discussions	4	4%
Able to understand all conversations involving work	18	16%
Welsh language reading skills		
No skills	41	37%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	7	6%
Able to read basic words and phrases (e.g signs or short and simple notes)	26	24%
Able to read basic material involving work (slowly)	7	6%
Able to read routine material with a dictionary	6	5%
Able to read the majority of material in own work area	7	6%
Able to understand all material involving work	16	15%
Welsh language speaking skills		
No skills	47	43%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	13	12%
Able to answer simple enquiries (e.g greetings, (Ble mae....? / Ga i siarad â....?)	17	15%
Able to answer simple enquiries involving work	6	5%
Able to converse with someone else, with some hesitancy, regarding routine work issues	7	6%

Able to speak the language in the majority of situations using some English words	1	1%
Fluent – able to conduct a conversation and answer questions, for an extended period of time where necessary	18	16%
Welsh language writing skills		
No skills	55	50%
Currently in the process of developing skills (e.g. attending Welsh course)	13	12%
Able to write basic messages (Diolch am y llythyr, Dyma gopi o.....)	12	11%
Able to answer simple correspondence with assistance	5	5%
Able to draft routine text, with editing assistance	5	5%
Able to prepare the majority of written material, with some revision assistance	9	8%
Skilled – able to complete complex written work without the need for revision	11	10%

Training – in accordance with standards 135 and 159

In accordance with standard 135, we have made provisions to offer our staff in Wales the ability to take part in 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 2023 to 1 August 2024, The OU recruited the following number of posts with specific language requirements to the OU in Wales:

(i)   Welsh language skills were essential – 0

(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 – 0

4. Focus on the coming year

Through Open Learn Cymru and Open Learn Wales, we will continue to offer quality bilingual learning. We plan to release even more courses and resources, which will be available in Welsh by design. We look forward to collaborating we new external partners across Wales to develop this content as part of our civic mission.

We will continue to advocate on behalf of part-time and distance learners in Wales. We have recently submitted evidence to the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee's Routes into post-16 education and training inquiry, arguing that suitable additional finance is made available for Welsh language education. We also look forward to inputting into the Welsh Government's Welsh Language and Education bill.

We plan to increase our presence Wales' summer shows including the Urdd Eisteddfod and National Eisteddfod. This will allow us to lead debates and conversations on education and lifelong learning with key stakeholders, as well as showcase our offer to Welsh language users – specifically our vocational courses.

The Welsh language is built in by design into many of our currently external projects. This includes a research project with the Welsh Rugby Union which is evaluating the experiences of school children in rugby training programmes in both Welsh and English medium schools; and through our Wales REACH programme (walesreach.org/hafan), we are helping residents in five communities engage with their local heritage and culture, with Welsh often being used as the main language with many groups.