

**The General Optical Council
Welsh Language Scheme
Prepared under the Welsh Language Act 1993**



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The General Optical Council

Welsh Language Scheme

The General Optical Council (GOC) Welsh Language Scheme was prepared in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993. The Scheme was approved by the Welsh Language Board under section 14 (1) of the Act on [Drafting Note (DN): to be confirmed]

The GOC believes that bilingual provision is important as a quality of service issue not just as a legal requirement. To this end, when providing services to the public in Wales, it will treat the English and Welsh languages on the basis of equality.

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Statement

1. The GOC has adopted the principle that in conducting its public business in Wales, it will treat the Welsh and English languages on the basis of equality. This Scheme identifies how the GOC will administer this principle when providing services in Wales.
2. The GOC is a London-based organisation. The GOC has a UK-wide remit and does not anticipate the need for an office in Wales. However the GOC intends to adhere to the Act since it is providing services to the people of Wales. In drawing up the measures set out in the Scheme, the GOC has taken account of what is appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practical.
3. While ultimate responsibility for the provision of services in Welsh rests with the Chief Executive, the Director of Communications and Information will oversee the day-to-day implementation of the Scheme.
4. This Scheme will only be altered with the agreement of both the GOC and the Welsh Language Board.

Introduction

5. The GOC was established by the Opticians Act 1958. It is a public authority which promotes the interests of patients and the public by regulating optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses in the UK. All optometrists and dispensing opticians must be registered with the Council to undertake those functions reserved by the Opticians Act to registrants of the GMC and GOC in the UK.
6. Dr Geoff Harris is the current Chairman of the GOC and Dian Taylor is the Registrar/ Chief Executive. The GOC's current Council includes six lay members and six registrant members.
7. Providing a bilingual service to the public in Wales is in the interests of public safety and will help the GOC to deliver its core values of transparency and organisational excellence, including high standards of customer service and equality and diversity.
8. Our purpose is to protect the public and promote good eye care. To achieve this we:
 1. Set standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct.
 2. Approve qualifications leading to registration.
 3. Maintain a register of individuals who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry on business as optometrists and dispensing opticians.
 4. Investigate and act where a registrant's **fitness to practise**, train, or carry on business is impaired.
9. Further information on our activities is given on our website and in our Annual Report which can be found on our website at www.optical.org.
10. The Chief Executive and Director of Communications & Information will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the scheme.
11. Further information on the Welsh Language Scheme can be obtained from Kate Fielding, Director of Communications and Information, General Optical Council, 41 Harley Street, London, W1G 8DJ

Service and planning delivery

12. The GOC acknowledges the importance of providing a service in the preferred language of the customer as part of a quality service.
13. The GOC recognises the cultural and linguistic needs of the Welsh speaking public and is fully committed to the principle that the English and Welsh languages will be treated on the basis of equality.

New policies and initiatives

14. As part of any proposal for a new policy, an assessment of the likely impact of the proposed initiative on the Welsh Language Scheme and the ability of others to provide services in Welsh will be undertaken. In addition, staff and managers involved in developing GOC policy will be made aware of the Welsh Language Scheme and the Council's responsibilities under the Welsh Language Act 1993.
15. There will also be:
 - a commitment to the need to ensure that new policies and initiatives will facilitate the use of Welsh, wherever possible;
 - a commitment that the new policies and initiatives will move the GOC closer to implementing the principle of equality at every opportunity;
 - a commitment to ensure that new policies and initiatives will be consistent with the scheme and will not undermine it.
16. Where a new initiative will affect other organisations, the GOC will bring to that organisation's attention the need to consider the Welsh language implications for their organisation.
17. The GOC will consult with the Welsh Language Board in advance on proposals which will affect the scheme or will affect the schemes of other organisations.
18. GOC will publish and distribute internal guidelines describing the arrangements made to implement these measures.

Delivery of service

19. The GOC is committed to the delivery of a bilingual service in accordance with the contents of this Scheme.

Standards of service in Welsh

20. The GOC is committed to providing an equally high quality service in both languages and this will be stated in key documents such as our Annual Report.
21. The GOC will:
 - set standards for providing services and dealing with the Welsh public in Welsh;
 - ensure consistency in the standard of the Welsh language service provided;
 - monitor the standard of service and its implementation.

Communicating with the Welsh-speaking public

22. The GOC's contact with the general public centres on dealing with optical patients. Guidance to staff on communicating with Welsh speakers will be issued.
23. As the GOC does not have any Welsh speaking staff, it will use a translation agency that deals with written communication as and when required.

Written communication

24. The GOC welcomes letters and other written correspondence in Welsh just as we do in English. Corresponding through the medium of Welsh will not of itself lead to a delay. Letters received in Welsh will receive a signed reply in Welsh, whenever a reply is required, in accordance with our published service standards. Correspondence received in English will be replied to in English.
25. The same principles will apply to email correspondence.
26. A database of individuals or organisations who wish to deal through the medium of Welsh will be established with the onset of the Scheme.
27. The GOC is committed to issuing circular and standard letters to the public in Wales bilingually.

Telephone communication

28. Due to current resources, both financial and human, the GOC is currently unable to offer a telephone service in the Welsh language.
29. When a call in Welsh is received from a member of the public, the caller will be offered the option of continuing the call in English or putting the query in writing. Guidance will be issued to staff.
30. The GOC recognises that this is not an ideal solution to fully meeting the needs of Welsh speakers. We will conduct a regular review of this provision in order to move towards being able to receive and deal with calls in Welsh in future.

Public meetings

31. The public are welcome to attend all GOC public meetings. When meeting in Wales, those proposing to attend will be asked to inform the GOC in advance of their wish to have present a Welsh language translator.

Other dealings with the public

32. The GOC will enable access to the relevant public areas of its website in English and Welsh. Most publications principally aimed at optical professionals will be available solely in English, although we will consider publishing them bilingually where this is proportionate.
33. Core information about the organisation will be available in Welsh. Members of the public in Wales will be able to download and complete a version of our complaints form in Welsh.
34. Prior to hearings of optometrists and dispensing optician professionals who were registered in Wales at the relevant time, those members of the public who are to be called as witnesses at Fitness to Practise hearings will be offered the choice of addressing the hearing in Welsh.

Corporate image

35. We will adopt a bilingual corporate identity for use in Wales.
36. We will use bilingual stationery for correspondence in Wales.

Publishing and printing material

37. The GOC issues publications for a variety of purposes. These publications are used in many European countries and are printed in English.
 - The Annual report will be available in both English and Welsh
 - Leaflets aimed at the general public will be available in both English and Welsh
 - The GOC does not routinely issue press releases and statements that relate specifically to Welsh issues. However press releases issued for the Welsh press will normally be issued in both English and Welsh at the same time
 - Guidance and other technical or specialised material aimed at professionals will be in English.
38. All GOC documents are free of charge. However, if in the future there is a cost attached to a publication, the selling price of a bilingual publication will not be greater than that of a single-language version of the same publication.

Implementing and monitoring the Scheme

Recruitment and training

39. The Head of Human Resources will ensure that those involved with recruitment and training are made aware of their obligations under the Welsh Language Scheme.
40. The GOC has identified that there are not currently any posts where the ability to speak Welsh is essential or desirable. However, this will be kept under review and should such a requirement be identified, this will be reflected in job descriptions and recruitment will be planned and advertised accordingly.
41. If a non-Welsh speaker is appointed to a post where the ability to speak Welsh is considered essential, a condition of employment will be to learn the language, with the full support of the organisation.

Learning Welsh

42. The GOC will encourage and make provision for staff to learn or improve their Welsh, where it is directly related to their work.

Staff and their responsibilities

43. All managers have a responsibility to implement those aspects of the Scheme which are relevant to their departments. They will be supported by this through staff guidance that will be written and disseminated following the approval of the Scheme

Recruitment in Wales

44. Official notices will appear:
 - bilingually in English language publications principally circulating in Wales;
 - in Welsh in Welsh language publications, and;
 - in English only in UK specialist publications.

Administrative arrangements made to facilitate the Scheme

45. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the GOC's Welsh Language Scheme, staff must understand the scheme and the implications it has on their day-to-day activities. The GOC will ensure that all staff are aware of their obligations under the Scheme.
46. New staff will be informed of the GOC's commitment to its Welsh Language Scheme through the GOC induction programme and information relating to the scheme will be included in the staff handbook that is currently being redrafted.
47. The GOC has given overall responsibility for the Welsh Language Scheme to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive is accountable to the GOC Council.

Third parties

48. Third party contractors with the GOC will be made aware of the GOC Welsh Language Scheme where it is relevant to their contractual duties, and particular attention will be drawn to any parts of the scheme they are expected to implement. Performance against such contracts will be monitored for compliance
49. When the GOC awards grants and loans for activities to be undertaken in Wales, it will include conditions with regard to the use of Welsh. In doing this it will have regard to the Welsh Language Board's guidelines on awarding grants and loans (Welsh Language Board Publication 2007 – Awarding Grants, Loans and Sponsorship: Welsh Language Issues).

Monitoring

50. The GOC will publish annually progress in implementing and monitoring its Welsh Language Scheme. The Chief Executive will monitor the implementation of the Scheme on the following basis:
 - whether the GOC is complying with the Scheme;
 - whether the Scheme is being appropriately managed;
 - an analysis of its performance on a departmental and corporate basis, in order to ensure consistency;
 - an assessment and consideration of key themes in scheme implementation
 - new policies and initiatives
 - standards of communication in Welsh
 - published and printed material;
 - a recognition of any fundamental weaknesses, and action plans which will include a timetable to deal with them.
51. In the third year of the Scheme's implementation, the GOC will prepare a report that will assess and evaluate performance in implementing the Scheme. This report will:
 - provide an analysis of service delivery and scheme management;
 - outline priorities for the following three years, together with a revised timetable for implementing the measures in the Scheme.
52. At this time, the GOC will revise and update the Welsh Language Scheme, as appropriate.
53. A copy of the annual reports will be sent to the Welsh Language Board as soon as possible after publication

Timescale and targets

54. Where targets are not specified the wording will indicate either that the measure is already in place, or it should be assumed that the measure will become operational following approval of the scheme by the Welsh Language Board.

Publicity for the Scheme

55. Upon launch of the Scheme, the GOC will issue a press release and publish the Scheme on our website. It will also form part of GOC's induction literature. The GOC key stakeholders in Wales will also be informed of the scheme.

Performance

56. The GOC is committed to publishing information relating to the achievement of the standards and targets set out in the scheme as follows:
- the Chief Executive will provide the Welsh Language Board with an annual update which describes progress in implementing the measures in the Scheme against the approved timetable;
 - the Chief Executive will review any occasion where published standards and targets are not met and produce an action plan addressing how GOC hopes to achieve these targets;
 - regular feedback will be provided to GOC staff;
 - the GOC's Annual report will contain information on the nature and extent of the services available in Welsh;
 - complaints with regard to performance may be made in English or Welsh. These should be addressed to Naomi Ford, Executive Assistant to Registrar / Chief Executive, General Optical Council, 41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ.

	Target	Timetable	Lead
1	Establish service agreement with translation agency	April 2009	Complete
2	Ensure impact assessment procedures reflect requirements of Welsh Language Scheme	July 2009	Complete
3	Brief staff and members on implications of the Welsh Language Scheme	December 2009	Kate Fielding
4	Review existing provision and assess requirements for Welsh language provision across all departments	September 2009	Complete
5	Offer FTP witnesses in relevant cases the choice of addressing the hearing in Welsh	December 2009	David Henley
6	Include information in induction for new staff about the Scheme along with some Language Awareness Training	December 2009	Lesa Oakley
7	Set up database of individuals and organisations who wish to deal in Welsh	July 2009	Complete
8	Review telephone procedure	October 2009	Complete
9	Access to public areas of website in Welsh	April 2010	Kate Fielding
10	Annual report in Welsh	September 2009	Complete
11	Complaints form and information available in Welsh	September 2009	Complete
12	Publish an annual report on progress of Welsh Language Scheme (and send to Welsh Language Board)	November 2010	Kate Fielding
13	Assess and evaluate performance in implementing Scheme, list next three years' priorities and revise Scheme	November 2012	Kate Fielding