

General Optical Council's Annual Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner 2025-26

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background	2
Embedding Welsh Language considerations	2
Service delivery standards.....	3
Learning and decision-making	4
Operational standards	4
Engagement with Welsh Language developments.....	5
Compliance and complaints	6
Looking ahead	6
Conclusion.....	6

Introduction

This year marks our third year of operating under the current Welsh Language Standards (WLS). The Standards have become an established part of how we work as a regulator. We see them not only as a statutory duty, but also as part of our broader commitment to fairness, inclusion and treating people with respect.

Over the past year, our focus has been on strengthening confidence and consistency in how we apply the Standards. This has included supporting colleagues and leaders to make informed decisions, considering Welsh language impacts at an earlier stage, and continuing to improve access to services for Welsh speakers.

This year also brought wider developments relating to the Welsh language, including thematic reports and updated guidance from the Welsh Language Commissioner. These provided useful opportunities to reflect on our approach and identify areas where we can continue to strengthen our work.

The progress we've made is thanks to the commitment of colleagues across the organisation, the support of the Welsh Language Standards Joint Regulators Forum, and ongoing engagement with stakeholders and the Welsh Language Commissioner. We recognise that promoting the Welsh language is ongoing work, and we remain committed to improving access and visibility year on year.

Our [previous annual reports](#) regarding the Welsh language can be found in both English and Welsh on our website.

Background

The General Optical Council (GOC) regulates eye care services across the UK. Our mission is to protect the public by upholding high standards in eye care services. We do this by:

- Setting standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct.
- Approving qualifications leading to registration.
- Maintaining a register of individuals who are fit to practise or train as optometrists or dispensing opticians, and bodies corporate who are fit to carry on business as optometrists or dispensing opticians.
- Investigating and acting where registrants' fitness to practise, train or carry on business may be impaired.

Our registrants include optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists and dispensing opticians and some businesses. We continue to approve Cardiff University as the only GOC-approved education provider in Wales. This gives us a direct link to students and registrants in Wales and underlines why ensuring fair access to services in Welsh matters.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 created the Welsh Language Standards and the role of the Welsh Language Commissioner. For the GOC, the Standards mean ensuring that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than English and that people across Wales have practical opportunities to use Welsh in their dealings with us.

Since becoming compliant with the Standards, we have continued to build on the foundations established during implementation. Welsh language considerations are now part of our everyday work, from translating documents to ensuring our website, telephone services and hearings can be accessed in Welsh when required.

Responsibility for day-to-day compliance remains with our EDI Manager, reflecting the fact that Welsh language is both a regulatory and an inclusion priority.

Embedding Welsh Language considerations

We have continued to take a practical and inclusive approach to embedding the Welsh Language Standards across the organisation.

This has included:

- Continuing to include Welsh Language Standards awareness within all new starter inductions.
- Maintaining guidance and resources for colleagues through our internal intranet.

- Working collaboratively through the Welsh Language Standards Joint Regulators Forum.
- Ensuring Welsh language considerations remain part of our Equality Impact Assessment process.
- Supporting leaders and managers to understand their responsibilities through targeted awareness and decision-making sessions.
- Reviewing guidance, correspondence and thematic reporting published by the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Throughout the year, colleagues sought advice on the application of the Standards across a range of workstreams. This helped ensure decisions were consistent, proportionate and aligned with the principle that Welsh should not be treated less favourably than English. This included consideration of publication requirements, digital services, communications, governance documents and policy development.

Service delivery standards

We have continued to strengthen the ways people can use our services in Welsh. During 2025-26:

- Our automated phone system and website remained available in Welsh.
- Welsh translations of key public-facing information continued to be provided.
- We maintained arrangements for Welsh language interpretation and translation services should they be required.
- Welsh language functionality remained available through our MyGOC platform.
- Welsh-language web content continued to be available through our website, supporting access to information in Welsh.

During the year, colleagues considered how Welsh language requirements apply to our digital services. Building on the implementation of Welsh-language access within MyGOC, colleagues reviewed how Welsh language requirements apply to registrant communications, online forms and automated communications. This helped ensure Welsh language users can receive services that are equivalent in quality and accessibility to those available in English. [https://optical-my.sharepoint.com/personal/jmurphy_optical_org/Documents/Microsoft Copilot Chat Files/Welsh Language Commissioner%27s Enforcement Policy.msg](https://optical-my.sharepoint.com/personal/jmurphy_optical_org/Documents/Microsoft%20Copilot%20Chat%20Files/Welsh%20Language%20Commissioner%27s%20Enforcement%20Policy.msg)

We also continued to promote our Welsh-language services through dedicated webpages and maintained clear information about how Welsh-speaking users can access support, correspondence, meetings and other services in Welsh.

Throughout the year, we continued to apply a proportionate approach when determining whether documents should be translated at publication. Consideration was given to the intended audience, subject matter, potential impact on Welsh speakers and the principle of treating Welsh no less favourably than English. Where a document was not translated proactively, clear arrangements remained in place for a Welsh version to be provided on request.

At the GOC, we want people to have real choice in how they use our services. That means being able to engage with us in Welsh where they wish to do so, whether through consultations, correspondence, meetings or access to translated materials.

Learning and decision-making

One of the areas we focused on during 2025-26 was helping colleagues feel more confident applying the Welsh Language Standards in practice.

Compliance is not always about translating every document or taking the same approach in every situation. Often it requires consideration of audience, impact and proportionality, while ensuring Welsh speakers are not disadvantaged.

During the year, we delivered a dedicated Welsh Language Standards session for senior leaders. The session focused on practical decision-making and encouraged colleagues to consider:

- Whether a Welsh speaker could be disadvantaged.
- Whether Welsh language implications had been considered early enough.
- Whether decisions could be clearly explained and justified.

We also supported colleagues with practical queries throughout the year, helping teams apply the Standards consistently across a range of work. This included advice on translation requirements, digital services and communications.

We also considered how the Welsh Language Standards apply to future changes to our overseas registration route. As part of this work, colleagues reviewed how Welsh language requirements may apply to application processes and interviews for overseas applicants. This included considering the potential impact on Welsh-speaking applicants, reviewing current arrangements and identifying appropriate contingencies should a request to use Welsh arise. Although no requests for Welsh-language provision through this route have been received to date, the discussion provided a useful opportunity to consider Welsh language implications at an early stage and ensure a clear and proportionate approach is in place for the future. This has strengthened our ability to make fair, transparent and evidence-based decisions while maintaining clear routes for Welsh language access where needed.

During the year, leaders were also briefed on developments in the Welsh Language Commissioner's regulatory approach, including the introduction of the revised Enforcement Policy. This provided an opportunity to reinforce expectations around documenting decisions, demonstrating proportionality in particular.

Operational standards

Our operational standards focus on embedding the Welsh language into the way we work as an organisation. This means supporting colleagues to develop skills,

monitoring language use across our workforce and ensuring Welsh language requirements are considered in recruitment.

During 2025-26 we:

- Continued to monitor Welsh language ability and usage through workforce equality monitoring.
- Assessed Welsh language requirements as part of recruitment processes.
- Continued to provide Welsh language awareness through induction and ongoing learning opportunities.

During the year, we sought clarification from the Welsh Language Commissioner's office regarding workforce monitoring and annual reporting requirements. This helped ensure our approach remained aligned with the Standards and provided greater clarity on our reporting obligations.

We also took the opportunity to review our recruitment arrangements and the way Welsh language requirements are considered in posts following correspondence from the Welsh Language Commissioner. While we are a UK-wide regulator and do not currently have roles where Welsh language skills are essential, reviewing our arrangements helped us assure ourselves that our approach remains proportionate, appropriate and aligned with the expectations of the Standards.

We will continue to monitor developments relating to workforce-related standards and any future guidance issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Engagement with Welsh Language developments

During the year, we reviewed thematic reports, guidance and correspondence issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner.

While much of this guidance is aimed at larger public bodies operating wholly within Wales, it nevertheless provided useful opportunities for reflection. In particular, it reinforced the importance of visibility, accessibility and workforce planning in supporting the Welsh language.

We also considered the revised Enforcement Policy published by the Commissioner. The policy places a strong emphasis on collaboration, support and continuous improvement, whilst also highlighting the importance of organisations being able to demonstrate how Welsh language considerations have informed their decisions.

Alongside this, we considered developments arising from the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 and reflected on any implications for our future approach.

These developments have helped shape our thinking and will continue to inform our work going forward.

Compliance and complaints

We did not receive any complaints relating to the Welsh Language Standards during 2025-26. While this suggests our arrangements are working effectively, we recognise that the absence of complaints alone does not demonstrate compliance. We therefore continue to monitor our arrangements proactively and provide clear routes for feedback and complaints in Welsh.

Looking ahead

Our focus for 2026-27 will be to:

- Continue to embed Welsh language considerations into organisational decision-making.
- Review Welsh-language content and user experience across our digital services.
- Monitor developments arising from the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 and any associated changes to expectations under the Standards.
- Continue engaging with the Welsh Language Standards Joint Regulators Forum.
- Keep our workforce and recruitment arrangements under review in light of emerging guidance from the Welsh Language Commissioner.
- Continue to monitor developments in the Commissioner's regulatory and enforcement approach.
- Explore opportunities to gather feedback from Welsh-speaking stakeholders on their experience of engaging with the GOC.

Conclusion

We are proud of the progress we've made during our third year of compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.

This year has been less about implementation and more about embedding the Standards into everyday decision-making. We have continued to strengthen services, support colleagues and leaders to understand their responsibilities, and reflect on emerging expectations from the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The Welsh language is an important part of the identity and culture of Wales, and our role as a UK-wide regulator is to ensure it is treated with fairness, respect and equality.

We see the Welsh Language Standards not only as a legal duty, but as an opportunity to build trust, promote inclusion and ensure Welsh speakers can access our services with confidence. We remain committed to learning, improving and building on the progress made over the past three years.