

General Optical Council's Annual Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner 2023-24

This report sets out how we have ensured our compliance with the Welsh Language Standards from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It outlines our work to implement the Welsh Language Standards (WLS), which came into effect for the General Optical Council (GOC) on 6 December 2023. The report describes our compliance with the WLS and demonstrates our commitment to promote and facilitate the Welsh Language.

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

Background

The GOC is the regulator for the optical sector across the UK. We have four core functions:

- Setting standards for the performance and conduct of our registrants.
- 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. As part of our work approving qualifications, we also work with a number of institutions where we have approved their optometry, dispensing optician, and/or specialty post-registration qualifications. Currently Cardiff University, which offers an optometry and independent prescribing qualifications, is the only GOC approved institution in Wales.

The Welsh Language Standards were created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This legislation created the position of the Welsh Language Commissioner, who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the WLS.

The Standards promote and facilitate the Welsh language and ensure that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than the English language in Wales. The WLS outline how we ensure our work is accessible to Welsh language speakers, including registrants and the public, and meeting the Standards is a statutory requirement. Failure to comply with the Standards can result in complaints to the Welsh Language Commissioner, who can take us to tribunal, impose sanctions, and potentially fine the GOC up to £5000 per non-compliance element.

We undertook a programme of work prior to the compliance deadline of 6 December 2023 to ensure we met the new standards. We now maintain the processes

necessary to ensure we meet our requirements under the WLS, while endeavouring to exceed them where we can, and where it is proportionate to do so.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager holds lead responsibility for monitoring our level of compliance on a day-to-day basis and promoting the Welsh language in all areas of responsibility for the GOC. Our Council has representation from all four of the devolved nations, including Wales, and our current representative, Lisa Gerson, maintains oversight.

Our approach

The GOC maintains multiple processes in place to ensure that Welsh language usage is promoted, facilitated, and supported in our activities.

All current employees have received training on the history of the Welsh language and its role in Welsh culture, as well as how to ensure inclusion of the Welsh language through compliance with the WLS. All new joiners undergo this training as part of the EDI induction. We host an intranet site about the Welsh language with resources for employees regarding meeting the WLS and options for developing their Welsh language skills.

Continual monitoring takes place to ensure compliance. We maintain translated documents and translate any relevant policies subject to revision. The EDI Manager regularly feeds into areas of work to ensure that Welsh language needs are considered and provides consultation advice regarding this throughout the year. We have also highlighted impacts on the Welsh language in the section of our Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) regarding the Devolved Nations. This ensures no policy decisions are made without consideration to how they may impact the promotion and facilitation of the Welsh language at the GOC and in all of its dealings.

The Standards require us to provide our online platforms in Welsh. As one of systems, MyGOC, is undergoing a large transformation project, we were granted an exception to the 6 December 2023 deadline for Standards 19 and 20 to allow us to complete this work. Our agreed deadline for this is 31 December 2024, and, as such, this is not covered in this report.

Service delivery standards

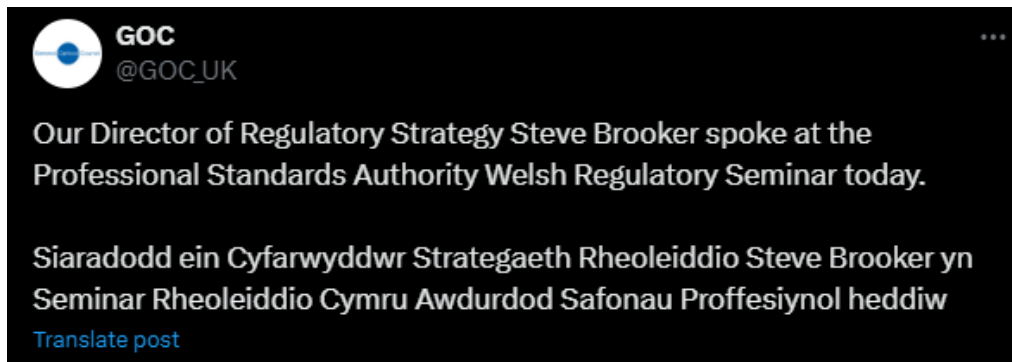
Prior to 6 December 2023, we updated our telephony standards to include Welsh as well as English language options. We have arrangements in place to support meetings in Welsh and all GOC employees have been briefed on how to arrange to hold these meetings, however, we have not yet been required to use these processes.

As well as meetings, we are prepared to hold fitness to practise hearings in Welsh, if requested, and our staff are trained in how to fulfil these arrangements. We have identified high-quality interpretation services who are able to provide dual

interpretation where needed. We did not receive any requests for hearings to be held in the Welsh language in 2023-24.

We have translated over 170 documents in the last year. All new or updated documents provided in Welsh since the compliance deadline have been produced to the same standard and published at the same time as the English versions. We would use this service to translate any Welsh correspondence we received. However, we have not yet been contacted in Welsh in writing.

Our website and consultation hubs are available in Welsh and all forms and any documents on the website relating to Wales and/or public protection have been translated into Welsh. We have chosen to publish some documents in Welsh that are not required by the WLS, such as our Acceptable Behaviour policy. Our communications standard practice regarding social media is to produce any posts in both English and Welsh if an event or topic relates specifically to Wales, as demonstrated during the Professional Standards Authority's Wales Seminar 2024, where we used [dual language tweets](#) (see below).



Our corporate identity elements and guidance regarding their use has been updated to include Welsh versions and advice for staff on how to include them. We have included a line in all our email signatures informing people that we are happy to be contacted in Welsh (see example below).

EDI Inbox

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Switchboard: 020 7580 3898 Email: edi@optical.org Web: www.optical.org | Twitter: [@GOC_UK](https://twitter.com/GOC_UK)

At the General Optical Council we are responsible, forward thinking and principled. [Read our mission and values online.](#)

Charity overview, GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL - 1150137, Register of Charities - The Charity Commission

[Rydym yn hapus i ddelio ag ymholiadau yn y Gymraeg](#)

We have not received any complaints regarding our responsibilities in respect to the WLS, but we provide the opportunity to submit [corporate complaints in Welsh](#), should anyone wish to raise a concern with us.

In addition to this report, we also translate our annual report and accounts, and our annual EDI report into Welsh.

Policy making standards

As part of our EqIA process, we assess any potential impacts on Welsh language use in all new or revised policy decisions. When we screen for Welsh language impacts, staff completing the EqIA are required to consider whether the policy or any parts relating to process, should be translated into Welsh.

When undertaking public consultations on policy, the draft EqIA is provided to allow us to seek stakeholder views on the impact assessment, including on any potential impacts on opportunities to use the Welsh language, and/or on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. The feedback provided in the consultation is taken into account before the final version of the policy proposals and the EqIA are sent to our Council for approval.

This last year, we consulted on a number of policy issues, as well as the revision of our Standards, and our strategy for 2025-2030. It was during our consultation on the strategy that we received positive feedback from Optometry Wales on having provided the consultation in Welsh:

“Optometry Wales is very grateful to the GOC for publishing the GOC strategy in the Welsh language. This supports registrants and patients to use the Welsh language as per the policy of the Welsh Government and offers choice which is appreciated.”

When presenting papers to decision makers, including our Senior Management Team and Council, our EqIA template includes a section about impacts and risks. In this section, there is a requirement to consider implications for the devolved nations, including Wales, and to consider the impact on promoting and facilitating the Welsh language.

Operational standards

All staff have been made aware of the option to develop their Welsh language skills, and we have a defined set of learning opportunities for them. Those that have demonstrated an interest in learning Welsh have been supported to pursue this; so far two employees have contacted us regarding this and begun to pursue the recommended learning.

Based on our 2023 staff survey, none of our employees have identified themselves as having any Welsh language skills. We have included a question about language use in our standardised EDI monitoring form, which is being rolled out across the GOC. This work, once complete, will allow us to monitor Welsh language usage at all levels of the GOC.

The WLS require all new positions to be assessed for Welsh language skill requirements. We have updated our practices and processes to ensure this happens. In the last twelve months, none of the posts assessed required Welsh language skills, as either desirable or essential criteria.

Conclusion

Since 6 December 2023, we have met the requirements of our compliance notice and, in some cases, exceeded these. We approach the WLS, not just as a matter of compliance, but as an equality and inclusion matter, hence responsibility for this working sitting with our EDI Manager. We intend to continue working in this way, engaging with others in the regulatory space to share best practice. We will work with our employees, members, and workers to promote and facilitate use of the Welsh language in Wales.

In 2024-25 we will continue to consider how we can promote and celebrate the Welsh language and ensure that we are treating it no less favourably than English.