

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Welsh Language Annual Report 2023-24

Prepared in
accordance with the
requirements of the
Welsh Language
Commissioner



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

1.1 Regulatory framework

This is the eighth Welsh Language Standards Annual Report Blaenau Gwent Council has published. The purpose of this report is to inform the public on any significant changes and updates made by the Council to improve compliance with the Welsh Language Standards; and detail the progress that has taken place over the last year in relation to the Welsh language and culture.

This report has been written in compliance with the [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) covering the financial period of April 1st 2023 to March 31st 2024.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 sets out the legal framework regarding the use of the Welsh language in the delivery of public services. Furthermore, under Standards 158, 164 and 170, all Local Authorities must publish a Welsh Language Annual Report that captures how the Council has been compliant with the service delivery, policy making, and the operational standards. As such the purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of how our organisation has promoted and facilitated opportunities to use the Welsh language, and ensure we are compliant with our statutory duties to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

1.2 Governance and accountability

Blaenau Gwent Council, as a public body, has a key role in helping to support and encourage the promotion of the Welsh language and is committed to meeting its Welsh Language Standards by being 'a fair, open, and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities' as outlined in our [Corporate Plan 2022/27](#).

The Corporate Plan 2022/27 recognises the Welsh language as being a key policy area which helps us deliver against our priorities which are centred on improving the well-being of local people and communities.

Implementing the standards

All staff are responsible for helping to support the organisation in meeting the Welsh Language Standards and for supporting and encouraging the promotion of the Welsh language.

The Policy & Partnerships Team provides advice, guidance, and professional support across the organisation to ensure the Council is meeting its Welsh language commitments and statutory requirements.

During this reporting period development work has been undertaken to strengthen the Council's existing performance monitoring arrangements via business planning. All directorates and service areas are now required to provide quarterly updates on Welsh Language Standards compliance and actions taken to support the objectives set out in the [Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27](#).

Political and Professional Leadership

The Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance continues to hold portfolio responsibility for the Welsh Language. The Welsh Language Annual Report is considered by Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet, and when appropriate the Council.

Each year the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report is presented to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). CLT includes all the senior officers and is the decision-making body for the corporate element of the Council.

Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network consists of local Welsh language groups and agencies and council services that focus on supporting the use of Welsh in the area. The purpose of this group is to work collectively to help support the delivery and monitoring of the [Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27](#) our [Welsh Language Compliance Notice](#) and to share resources, learning, and good practice. During this reporting period the network has held two forums.

The Education Transformation Team

The Education Transformation Team review and monitor the [Welsh in Education Strategic Plan \(WESP\)](#) monthly; providing termly reports to the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) and provides annual reports to Welsh Government. In addition, WEF development and progress reports are taken via the Council's political processes annually. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is also a key focus of the 21st Century Schools Programme Board and Admissions Forum.

2. Since 2016 Blaenau Gwent Council has had a statutory requirement to work in accordance with the [Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice](#) issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. It is the responsibility of all staff to consider the Welsh language and ensure it is treated no less favourably than the English language.

Therefore, whilst consideration and inclusion of the language is a consistent thread through the Councils day-to-day activity, the information detailed below provide examples of how compliance has been reinforced over the past year in relation to our service delivery, policy, and operational standards.

2.1 Service delivery standards

Standards 1-7

Correspondence sent by a body

More staff members can now access the cymraeg@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk mailbox which helps to improve our Welsh language service for those who want to email the Council in Welsh. The account has received more emails over the last year, and we are collaborating with Education staff who are responsible for delivering and monitoring the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to add this email to their published content for faster Welsh language replies.

We need to have a statement in every email account that ends with @blaenau-gwent.gov.uk, saying that we accept Welsh correspondence and that it will not cause any delay in our reply. We have informed staff of this requirement in the Welsh language training sessions that have been offered to all departments, so that we can deal with any Welsh correspondence efficiently by sending it to the Cymraeg mailbox or the Welsh Language Support Officer directly (following the General Data Protection Regulations).

In addition, we have sent out reminders to all staff with the poster below:

**Siarad Cymraeg
Speak Welsh**

Standard 7

Correspondence Statement

The following statement must be included in:

- Correspondence
- Publications that invite persons to respond to or correspond with the body
- Official notices that invite persons to respond or correspond with the body

'Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg a byddwn yn cyfathrebu gyda chi yn eich dewis iaith, dim ond i chi rhoi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn creu unrhyw oedi.

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English and we will communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to any delay.'

Available on the Intranet under 'Correspondence Statement' in the Welsh Language Guidance

Blaenau Gwent

We also sent a reminder to all staff in the weeks leading up to the Christmas period that included out of office templates tailored to the festive period. This was done to ensure outgoing messages were continuing to inform the sender that we welcome correspondence in Welsh.

Standards 8-22

Calls made and received by a body

Manager briefs have been developed to regularly remind staff members of the 'Telephone Procedure' which ensures effective compliance. Throughout the last year several directorates have received guidance sessions that help them use the intranet resources that explain how to work in line with the Welsh Language Standards, including the 'Telephone Procedure'. In addition, customer facing staff who handle calls daily have received practice sessions with the Welsh Language Support Officer to build confidence and momentum.

We have created a Microsoft Teams channel to enable an efficient Welsh speaking response when the need to transfer a Welsh speaking call occurs. The channel is made up of identified staff that speak Welsh fluently and the customer facing staff that manage the day-to-day enquiries of the Council. The Teams Channel provides immediate chat support to help the contact centre staff who cannot speak Welsh. The contact centre staff will use the channel to find out if a Welsh speaker is free to take over the call and deal with the customer's query.

The Policy Team have also supported the Strategic Transformation Team in their organisational wide telephony review, acting as a sounding board for decisions made in relation to departments Voicemails and Interactive Voice Response (IVR). A standard way of greeting callers in Welsh has been established and applied to the main telephone lines that serve the public, and more improvements have been done to the IVR's to increase their compliance.

Standard 32

Where persons have been invited to speak at a meeting, the body must ask those persons whether they wish to use the Welsh language at the meeting.

If one or more persons inform the body that they wish to do so, the body must provide a simultaneous translation service from Welsh to English at the meeting (unless the meeting is held in Welsh without a translation service).

We have revised the Welsh Language Standards Overview guide to reflect the Agile working model. We have also made a Microsoft Sway that shows how to set up simultaneous translation for Microsoft Teams meetings. The Welsh Language Support Officer is delivering sessions on these topics to each department as part of a new programme of work. These sessions cover how to find and follow the Welsh language guidance, how to use the guidance correctly, and provide answers to any questions staff may have on working under the Welsh language standards.

Organize a meeting with language interpretation

Language interpretation can be added to any meeting. After you organize a meeting, you can add language interpretation to it and invite your organization's interpreters to join.

To create a meeting with language interpretation:

1. Create and launch a meeting in Teams
2. In Teams, select the calendar and open the meeting you want to add language interpretation to.
3. Select Meeting options.
4. Turn on the Enable language interpretation toggle.



5. Search for an interpreter or select one from the Interpreters dropdown menu and designate their source and target languages. Search or choose multiple interpreters from the dropdown menu to assign them all to the same language channel.
 6. Select Add more interpreters if your meeting needs additional language channels.
- Note: These language interpretation only supports one-to-one interpretation. If the meeting requires the translation of multiple source languages, the organizer must add additional interpreters.
7. Select Save to apply interpretation settings.

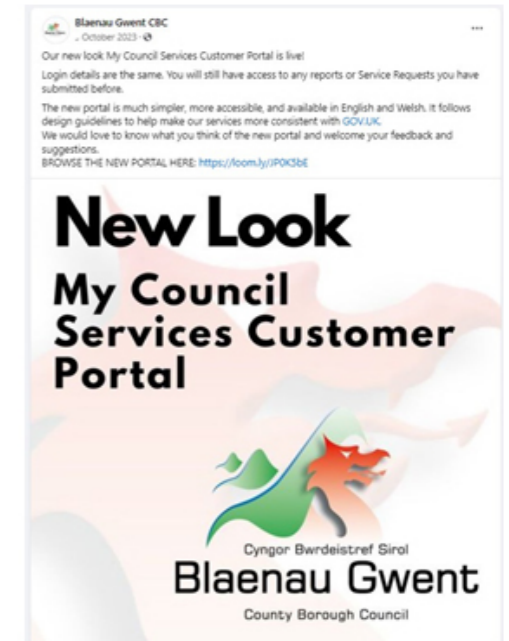
Designate an interpreter during the meeting

To assign guest or external interpreters, designate them as an interpreter during the meeting:

1. In your meeting, select Participants.
2. Hover over the person you want to make an interpreter and select More options ... > Make an interpreter.

My Council Services

The Council online portal has had a full remodel. The portal enables our residents to send in requests for services online, residents can set up an account to have simple and efficient access to a myriad of services, and track the progress of their requests. This portal is available in Welsh making it easy to access our services through the medium of Welsh.



Standard 81

A body must promote and advertise any Welsh language service that it provides, and do so in Welsh.

We have also taken some steps to motivate the public to use Welsh when they get in touch with the Council, showing the various ways they can access our services in Welsh. When we thought about how to best advertise our enhanced services, we followed the good practice examples from the Welsh Language Commissioners Office. Based on Carmarthenshire County Council's communications campaign, we have added the following message to our communications plan for the rest of the year.

Pa bynnag ffordd ...

... mae 'na groeso i chi **gysylltu** â Chyngor Blaenau Gwent yn **Gymraeg**

Whichever way ...

... you're welcome to **communicate** with Blaenau Gwent Council in **Welsh**

2.2 Policy Making Standards (Standards 88 – 97)

Standard 98

Standards relating to the use of the Welsh language within a body's internal administration

Standard 98 requires all Councils to develop a policy on using Welsh internally for the purpose of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language, this policy must be published on our intranet. A policy has been developed and was approved by our Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee in August 2023.

The policy applies to all Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council staff and will support the Council in meeting its statutory duties as set out in the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice. The purpose of the policy is as follows:

- a) To encourage a positive attitude towards the Welsh language that embraces Welsh culture with pride and respect.
- b) Increase the number of staff with Welsh language skills by providing opportunities for employees to learn or improve their linguistic ability.
- c) Ensure the Welsh Language Measure 2011 is upheld on an organisation-wide level.

The policy outlines how to follow rules and principles that uphold the Welsh language and culture in the workplace. This policy makes us more responsible and shows what our organisation stands for. The policy has helped us use the communication plan we made at the start of 2024 to increase awareness and visibility of the language, traditions, and heritage.

Post Entry Training Policy

To ensure we are doing all we can to support and encourage staff to undertake Welsh language training, the Policy Team reviewed the organisational developments 'Post Entry Training Policy'. Whilst this policy relates to training that results in a formal recognised qualification, such as an NVQ we wanted to be able guide staff to information on all the Welsh language training opportunities available. Therefore, we created and posted a training procedure document on the council's intranet, and updated the post entry training policy to highlight the availability of Welsh training opportunities for staff. For more information on the Welsh training opportunities please see page 68.

2.3 Operational standards (Standards 98 -144)

Standard 99

A body must ask an individual who is offered a new post whether they wish their contract of employment or contract for services to be provided in Welsh. The body must provide the contract in Welsh if the individual so wishes.

The Council's organisational development/recruitment platform - iTrent, records the language preference for the contract of employment or contract for services of a new appointee. This year, there was a small rise in the number of staff who preferred bilingual or Welsh correspondence on the database, with 23 staff members in total in comparison to 19 in 2023.

Standard 127

A body must assess the Welsh language skills of its employees. The outcomes of the assessment may enable a body to plan its workforce so that there are sufficient levels of Welsh language skills to respond to any needs by:

- **identifying the current Welsh language skills of the workforce, and through this, identifying who can provide services in Welsh**
- **identifying the body's needs in terms of Welsh language skills, including assessing the need for Welsh language skills for a new or vacant post in accordance with standard 136, and**
- **planning to maintain and increase the workforce's Welsh language skills in order to meet those needs.**

The assessment process for Welsh language skills required for existing and new job roles has been reviewed and re-developed during this reporting period. Since the Welsh language standards were imposed on our Council, we have used the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) framework. During our review we considered switching to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as several other local authorities in Wales have opted for this method of assessment.

However, following a pilot Managers reported that staff felt that the CEFR's beginner levels were too advanced and had the potential for to downgrade their precepted language skill level. Therefore, we continue to use the familiar ALTE framework, but we have merged the Senedd's 'Courtesy' level and level 1 of the ALTE framework, as we aim to eliminate the negative perceptions of Welsh language skills that we have observed when discussing with our staff and learning from our Welsh language networks.

Staff can access the new framework on the 'iTrent' system to update their language skill levels easily and fast, instead of checking the framework on the intranet like before. We have done a significant amount of internal and external communications work to highlight the value the council as an employer sees in 'Level 1 – Courtesy Level'. We have distributed posters, as shown below, and communicated messages about Courtesy Level in managers briefs, with spoken repetition in the teams sessions based on Welsh guidance to help staff recognise their skills. We are pleased with this work as the data for this year shows an increase of 77 staff members who reported having Courtesy to Foundation Level Welsh language speaking skills compared to the last year's report. (Please see 57 - 67 page for a breakdown of staff linguistic ability as of March 2024).

The Association of Language Testers in Europe framework with the inclusion of Courtesy level			
Level	Listening / Speaking	Understanding / Reading	Writing
Level 0	No current Welsh language skills	No current Welsh language skills	No current Welsh language skills
Level 1 - Entry (Courtesy)	I can: Pronounce familiar Welsh words, place names, department names, etc. Greet others and understand a greeting. Use basic every day words and phrases, e.g. please, thank you, excuse me, etc.	I can: Understand simple key words and sentences on familiar / predictable matters relating to my own job area, e.g. on sign, in letters	I can: Fill in simple forms, note down simple information, e.g. date and venue of a meeting with Welsh address, etc.
Level 2 - Foundation	I can: Understand the gist of Welsh conversation in work. Respond to simple job-related requests and request for factual information when simple language is used at a slow pace Ask simple questions and understand simple responses Understand instructions said slowly using simple language	I can: Understand factual, routine information, on familiar matters related to my own job area, e.g. in standard letters, leaflets, etc.	I can: Write short simple notes / messages on a limited range of predictable topics related to my personal experiences or y own job area
Level 3 - Intermediate	I can: Understand much of what is said in the office, meetings, etc. Keep up a simple conversation on a work related topic, but may need to revert to English to discuss / report on complex or technical information Answer predictable or factual questions Take and pass on most messages that require attention Offer advice on simple job-related matters Express opinions in a limited way as long as the topic is familiar	I can: Scan texts for relevant information Understand a fair range of job-related routine and non-routine text when standard language is used	I can: Write a formal letter relating to my own job area, but will need to have it checked by a Welsh speaker Make notes while someone is talking
Level 4 - Advanced	I can: Keep up an extended casual work related conversation with a good degree of fluency and range of expression but may need to revert to English to answer unpredictable questions or explain complex points or technical information Contribute effectively to meetings and seminars within own area of work Argue for/against a case	I can: Read and understand information fairly quickly as long as no unusual vocabulary is used and no particularly complex or technical information is involved	I can: Prepare formal letters of many familiar types such as enquiry, complaint, request and application Take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or straightforward dictation Write a straightforward report / document relating to my own job area, but will need to have it checked by a Welsh speaker
Level 5 - Proficiency	I can: Advise on / talk about routine, non-routine, complex, contentious or sensitive issues related to own experiences Give a presentation / demonstration Deal confidently with hostile or unpredictable questions Carry out negotiations using complex / technical terms Give media interviews	I can: Understand complex ideas and information expressed in complex or specialist language in documents, reports correspondence and articles, etc.	I can: Write letters on any subject Write full / accurate notes of meetings while continuing to follow discussions and participate in them Write reports / documents with confidence but they may need to be checked for minor errors in terms of spelling roger rammer

Standard 130

A body must provide opportunities during working hours.

Standard 131

A body must provide opportunities for employees who have completed basic Welsh language training to receive further training free of charge, to develop their language skills.

Standard 132

A body must provide employees with training in the following areas:

- Awareness of the Welsh language.
- An understanding of the duty to operate in accordance with the Welsh language standards.
- An understanding of how the Welsh language can be used in the workplace.

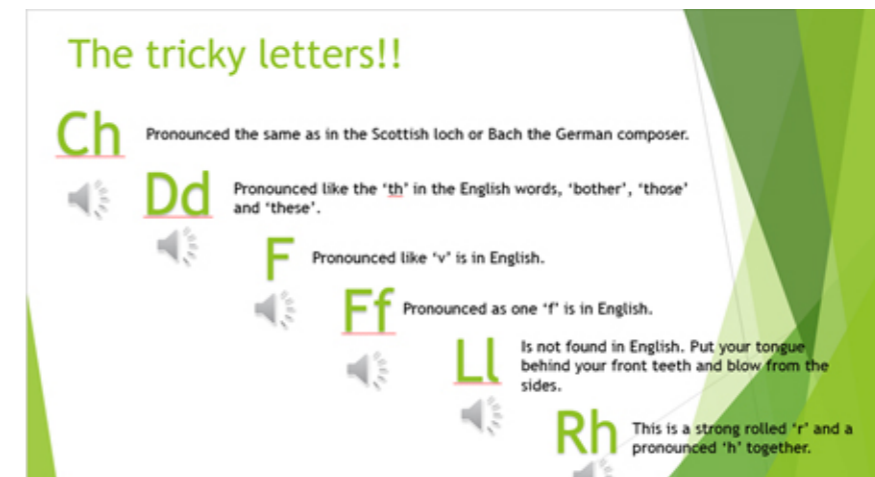
We have taken several steps to enhance the provision and access of Welsh language training during this reporting period, including the development of a Welsh training procedure that complies with Standards 130, 131, and 132. As mentioned in the Policy Making Standard section above, this procedure is linked to the Council's Post Entry Training policy. The procedure explains all the different types of training from the courses on our e-learning platform, those delivered online and in person by Dysgu Cymraeg Gwent and the resources that can be downloaded from the Welsh Guidance section of the intranet

We have also created and published the following learning resources during this reporting period:

Introduction to Welsh – Entry Level

The purpose of these slides is to introduce the language to staff who have no Welsh language speaking skills. The training starts by going through the alphabet as the sounds of Welsh are different from those of English, and this is the basis of effective learning. As shown below, the slides have audio clips for staff to listen to how to say the words correctly, paying attention to the double letters that exist in Welsh but not in English, such as 'Ch', 'Dd' and 'Ll'.

The slides also teach some conversational Welsh, like asking how someone is and common workplace phrases. We added some texts for emails to use at work to help the language grow online. The slides end with some ideas on how the staff accessing the training can learn more Welsh. This includes the resources they can access and the Welsh groups and clubs in Blaenau Gwent.



Welsh Language Awareness

Welsh Language Awareness training has three main goals: to boost the cultural knowledge of our staff and motivate them to learn, to show how staff can use the language at work and elsewhere, and to stress the need to work according to our legal obligations.

The course starts by showing why it matters to know our country's history, language and culture. Then it traces the history of Wales and its language from the Celtic tribes around 500 BC to today. It also highlights key moments in Welsh politics where people fought for their culture and language. For example, we tell the story of Trefor and Eileen Beasley, who refused to pay their taxes in English when most of their area spoke Welsh. They resisted for 8 years until they got bilingual tax demands in 1960. Staff who did this course said this story helped them understand why our organisation wants to improve our Welsh service delivery and make the language visible in Blaenau Gwent.

The Importance of Bilingual Council Services Public action that helped changed laws

- ▶ Between 1952 and 1960 Trefor and Eileen Beasley of Llangennech, in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire refused to pay their local taxes unless the tax demands were in Welsh.
- ▶ The local authority (Llanelli Rural District) was 84% Welsh speaking in 1951.
- ▶ During the 8 year battle the Beasleys had their furniture taken by bailiffs three times but refused to give up on their goal of receiving Welsh language service.
- ▶ Finally in 1960 bilingual tax demands were issued.



The course concludes by exploring how to use the language within the workplace via formal training and informal suggestions like simply listening to a Welsh playlist on your lunch break while working from home.

New Training Portal Being Commissioned – Thingi

The Organisational Development Team is currently commissioning a new training portal, 'Thingi'. This portal is planned to be made available to staff in the second half of 2024. While the resources currently available via the Council's intranet will remain accessible to staff, the new portal will also have further training resources and a more.



Recruiting and Appointing

Standard 136

If a body assesses the requirements for a new or vacant post, it must assess the need for Welsh language skills, and categorise it as a post where one or more of the following apply:

- Welsh language skills are essential
- Welsh language skills need to be learnt when appointed to the post
- Welsh language skills are desirable
- Welsh language skills are not necessary.

Standard 136A

If a body has categorised a post (in accordance with standard 136) as one where Welsh language skills are essential, desirable or need to be learnt it must:

- specify that when advertising the post, and
- advertise the post in Welsh.

During this reporting period we have made significant changes to the recruitment process with the goal to advertise more roles with Welsh skills as essential. Before creating a job advert, managers need to fill out a Recruitment Authorisation form. This form determines the job description, advertisement request, interview process and any subsequent employment. The last section of this form is the 'Welsh Language Skills Assessment'. Since the Standards 136 and 136a were applied to the Council in March 2016, the Council has evaluated the Welsh language skills needed for all new or vacant roles.

The revised assessment encourages a more active approach to finding people with Welsh skills. As mentioned on page 13, Standard 127 has updated the Welsh Language Skills Assessment Framework to make it more accurate for self-assessing one's Welsh language abilities. The addition of 'courtesy' level Welsh is to show the importance and potential that the Council, as an employer, sees in having any level of Welsh speaking ability. We have created a continuous communications campaign to convey this message to the public and urge applicants to include their Welsh skills no matter how small when applying through our social media channels. An example can be seen below.

You're more skilled than you realise

We see the value of courtesy level Welsh - do you?

If you can say simple greetings, phrases and place names in Welsh you're already at Level 1, so let us know when you apply for a job at Blaenau Gwent Council.

The Council is interested in your potential and can offer a wide range of training.

Cymraeg

Amendments have been made to the Recruitment Authorisation Form to include a flow chart that determines the Welsh language skills category required on the job advert. The changes have been made to strengthen consideration for Welsh language skills within roles and in turn recruit more Welsh speaking members of staff into the organisation, particularly when recruiting for a role that has direct contact with the public.

The manager is required to establish whether they have a member of staff who is able to provide the service in Welsh. If they do, the vacancy could be advertised as Welsh language skills being desirable.

However, if the team **does not** have a member of staff who is able to provide the service in Welsh and the vacancy has contact with the public, the vacancy will need to be advertised using one of the following:

- Welsh language skills Level 1 Entry/Courtesy (as a minimum) are desirable and need to be learnt when appointed. An online training course "Welcome Part 1 & 2" would be required to be undertaken (10 hours in total). This option would be used if the contact with the public is infrequent (monthly).
- Welsh language skills Level 1 Entry/Courtesy (as a minimum) are essential. Applicants who do not meet this requirement would not be shortlisted for interview. Online training courses need to be undertaken on appointment, unless previously undertaken. "Welcome Part 1 & 2" and "Welcome Back Part 1 & 2" would be required to be undertaken (20 hours in total). This option would be used if the contact with the public is frequent (daily/weekly).

Completion of the above online training courses need to be monitored by the manager. All roles are still required to be advertised with Welsh language skills as 'desirable' as a minimum.

Number of Jobs Advertised

During this reporting period a total of 288 job adverts have been published, 3 of which have been noted as 'Welsh essential', with the remaining 285 being categorised as 'Welsh desirable'. While we appreciate this is a rather low figure, we hope to see this increasing following the changes notes above having been approved in mid-February 2024.

2.4 Meeting our Promotional Standards / Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27

All local authorities across Wales are required to produce a strategy outlining how we, along with support from our partnerships intend on promoting the language, increasing language visibility and opportunities to engage with the language and culture. Our strategy has been written in line with Welsh Governments target of reaching 1 million Welsh speakers across Wales by 2050. The most recent Census data (2021) identified 4,035 Welsh speakers living within Blaenau Gwent, which equates to 6.2% of its population. To meet the Welsh Governments goal of one million speakers in the next 28 years Blaenau Gwent would need a 46% increase. 46% being an additional 1,856 speakers, equating to 66 additional speakers annually.

We are currently in the second year of implementation for the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27.

Blaenau Gwent's promotion strategy is split into three primary objectives as noted below:

Objective 1 – Family and Community

'Working with our partners we will promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within families and the community.'

Objective 2 – Children and Young people

'To increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people'

Objective 3 – Welsh in the Workplace

'To increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace'

Promotion Strategy and Business Planning Arrangements

During this reporting period internal monitoring procedures have been reviewed and updated to include the consideration of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy within the business planning arrangements for all directorates.

The Council's business plans are overseen by our Performance Management Team. The reports are updated on a quarterly basis by Senior Managers, including Service Managers, Heads of Service, Chief Officers and Directors. This information reported is included is used to populate progress reports and annual reports across the Council. The annual self-assessment process allows the Council to reflect on progress made against the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2022-27.

Inclusion of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy within the reporting for all areas within the Council supports its implementation in relation to both the actioning the strategy and it's successful monitoring. When drafting our previous annual report it become apparent that our monitoring process' weren't successfully capturing the great work being completed across the Council to support the Welsh language. Inclusion of the Promotion Strategy within the business plans aims to make staff more aware of how their work can and does support our objectives and ensures more accountability against specific actions as we are able to monitor their application within the relevant departments work.

Shared Prosperity Funding for Welsh

Communities and Place : Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities.

At the beginning of 2024 the Policy Teams applied for Shared Prosperity Funding to support the continued employment related costs and associated activities of a Welsh Language Support Officer role within the council. This funding is instrumental in supporting the delivery of the promotion strategy.

Blaenau Gwent has an active Welsh language society and Menter Iaith, and a shared appreciation and respect for the language. This is shown by the creation of a new Welsh medium seedling school in Tredegar, owing to the lack of available places in our other Welsh medium primary school.

We want to keep this momentum going with the role of the Welsh Language Support Officer, who can plan and run events that encourage and support the use of the Welsh language. Working together with both Welsh medium schools and English medium schools through the education forum will give the officer a good opportunity to carry out the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, which is very important for the promotion strategy.

Using the new Welsh Language Support Officers' skills and passion for the Welsh language/our mother tongue, they can spark an interest in the language in many ways, such as increasing the use of incidental Welsh and helping to provide opportunities for Welsh to be used casually in the community.

The Welsh Language Support Officer has already started to strengthen our partnerships, visiting local Welsh language groups to find out how we can use the language more in Blaenau Gwent, learning from good practice and listening to suggestions. The officer has also been giving sessions to all teams in the Council, offering advice on how to not only work in line with our Welsh language requirement, but how to really use and enjoy the language in the workplace. This training for staff will be very helpful for residents, as we build better capacity across the departments to deliver our services in Welsh.

The funding has built capacity within the Policy Team to support implement the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy's objectives. Our communications plan aims to promote the positive aspects of our Welsh language and culture inside our organisation, outside with the public, and through our education channels. We have shared some Welsh cultural awareness posts on social media and some activity ideas in school bulletins. See the following for some examples.

Embracing the language during the Six Nations 2024

Blaenau Gwent CBC
29 January · 🌐

It's time for the six nations – something we're sure will lift a lot of spirits! Rugby union in Wales is considered a large part of Welsh national culture. Rugby union is thought to have reached Wales in the 1850s, with the national body, the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) being formed in 1881. Wales are considered to be one of the most successful national sides in Rugby Union.

The Six Nations Rugby tournament kicks off on the 2nd of February 2024, with the first Wales game against Scotland starting at 4.45pm on 3 February at the Principality stadium, Cardiff.

Taking part in singing the National Anthem is a way to honour and pay respect to our country's values, history and traditions, therefore in preparation we have provided information below to help you to learn more about Welsh National Anthem:

https://loom.ly/bkD_avE

Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau - sing the Welsh national anthem

<p>Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi Gwlad beirdd a chantorion, enwogion o fri Ei gwrol ryfelwyr, gwladgarwyr tra mād Tros ryddid gollasant eu gwaed</p>	<p>This land of my fathers is dear to me Land of poets and singers, and people of stature and people of stature Her brave warriors, fine patriots Shed their blood for freedom</p>
<p>Gwlad, Gwlad, pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad Tra môr yn fur i'r bur hoff bau O bydded i'r heniaith barhau</p>	<p>Land, Land! I am true to my land! As long as the sea serves as a wall for this pure, dear land May the language endure- for ever.</p>

Celebrating Dydd Miwsig Cymraeg (Welsh Language Music Day)

Blaenau Gwent CBC
8 February · 🌐

9 February 2024 is Welsh Language Music Day
Welsh Language Music Day celebrates all forms of Welsh Language music. Whether you're into indie, rock, punk, funk, folk, electronica, hip hop or anything else, there's incredible music being made in the Welsh language for you to discover.
But you don't have to wait until Welsh Language Music Day to share your love for Welsh language music or to find your favourite new tune, just follow @Miwsig or search #Miwsig.
Why not enjoy some music with your family: <https://loom.ly/VzNT6Ao>

Dydd Miwsig Cymraeg!

Welsh language Music Day!

What is 'Dydd Miwsig Cymraeg'?

Dydd Miwsig Cymraeg ([Welsh Language Music Day](#)) is an annual event on the 9th of February celebrating all forms of Welsh language music. This is the ninth Dydd Miwsig Cymraeg and we hope you will join us in celebrating our Welsh culture!

How can your school get involved?

Primary School	Secondary Schools
Listen to Seren a Sbarc a Welsh playlist tailored for children.	Listen to Best of Wales playlist.
Play Welsh songs and ask students to move to the music. Encourage them to create their own movements inspired by the sounds and lyrics.	Album Cover Design: Create a visual representation of a song or album. Think visually - which images, colours, and symbols best represent your music and its message.
Challenge your class to design a poster for a miwsig gig or use our poster templates and ask them to write what they'd like to do to celebrate Dydd Miwsig Cymru 2024	Create a Welsh language song using Dydd Miwsig Cymru Lesson Plan
Cewri Cymru : Join in on this series of online educational sessions that highlight notable individuals who have taken advantage of their ability to speak Welsh	Does your school have a choir – why not perform a Welsh song for this special day?
Does your school have a choir – why not perform a Welsh song for this special day?	Research the Welsh music scene in Blaenau Gwent – let's get involved!
Divide students into groups and provide them with recycled materials to create their own simple instruments. Encourage them to be creative and experiment with different sounds before adding Welsh lyrics	Lyrics Reimagined: Adapt the lyrics of a Welsh song to address a contemporary issue or theme relevant to their own lives, keeping the spirit of the original music. Present their reworked lyrics or perform them creatively.

You don't have to wait until Welsh Language Music Day to share your love for Welsh language music or to find your favourite new tune, just follow @Miwsig or search #Miwsig.

Dydd Gwyl Dewi Celebrations funded by SPF

The following letter was posted on our schools bulletin in January 2024 launching a competition to design the cover of this report and attend a special St Davids Day presentation at the General Offices all funded through the Shared Prosperity Fund.



Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Schools Drawing Competition!
Design the Welsh Language Annual Report Cover!

What is the Welsh Language Annual Report?
 Blaenau Gwent Council must publish a report every year that updates on all the great work that we and our partners in the area have done in the past year to support the Welsh language.
 We want your help in creating the cover – please send in a drawing/painting/image to be used as the cover to this years report. **The winner's image will be used as the front cover of our annual report and will be invited to an event at the General Offices on the 1st of March to receive their certificate!**

What could you draw?
 We want your entry to be a drawing/painting/photo of what you think of when you think of Blaenau Gwent and what it means to be Welsh.
 How about drawing one of our local landmarks like, The Guardian of the Valleys, The General Offices, Tredegar Town Clock...





Who can enter?
 This competition is open to all students in years 5 and 6.
 Please send your entries in by the 26th of February 2024 to Katherine.watkins-hughes@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



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We had a number of exceptional entries, leaving our elected members with the tough task of choosing the winner. They ultimately named Lyla Kirwan of Ystruth Primary School the winner for her phenomenal drawing of The Guardian of the Valleys statue in Abertillery, surrounded by a beautiful bed of daffodils. Lyla's artwork can be seen on the cover of this report.



Lyla, along with her mother and father attended the ceremony at the General Offices where she can be seen photographed with Councillor Edmunds who presented Lyla with a hamper of Welsh themed art books.



The event brought together key members, offering a glimpse into the history of Dydd Gwyl Dewi from Councillor Smith following a welcoming performance of Welsh songs from Abertillery Male Orpheus Choir. We then had to opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of our staff who have been completing a tutor led course via Dysgu Cymru, giving attendees information on the training available to them and ask the learners questions about their experience. We also heard from our interim Director of Education Luisa Munro-Morris all about the developments of the new Welsh medium seedling school in Tredegar.



The ceremony concluded with a moving performance of the Welsh National Anthem from the choir ([check out the video](#)) and some time to enjoy some Welsh cakes and Bara Brith from a local bakery.



The celebration was not limited to the General Offices, our Regeneration Team arranged a celebration with the local schools full of singing and more Welsh cakes in Brynmawr Market Square.

[Dydd Gwyl Dewi Hapus from Brynmawr Town](#)

[School Children singing at the Market Hall Cinema \(Wales' Oldest Cinema!\)](#)



Promotion of the Welsh Language at Abertillery

For the past year a Welsh club open to all level of abilities has been meeting on a Wednesday to converse in Welsh. This wonderful club is facilitated by Sarah Merton a library assistant and active Welsh learner and teacher. Sarah decided to learn Welsh after seeing the importance of the language and culture in France during her travels supporting the Wales National football team in 2016. She joined the Learn Welsh scheme in 2017. After finishing all course levels of Dysgu Cymraeg, Sarah received New Speaker of the Year award from Coleg Gwent last year.

"My tutor was amazing and continues to help me a lot".



Sarah is now working part time as a tutor for Dysgu Cymraeg. Sarah describes the group as:

“very informal and relaxed, we have a cuppa and just have a chat, it’s a pleasure to support learners and help them build confidence, Abertillery used to be a Welsh speaking community so every week we aim to collaborate to reclaim our mother tongue”.

Bethan Lawrence, Outreach Library Assistant for Blaenau Gwent libraries, offered the following in relation to the sessions:

“When I was in school, Welsh was just another subject to take and I didn’t have the interest to learn the language, even though I am proud of being Welsh and my heritage. It was only when I was in my 30s that I found out I had strong connections with my own Welsh speaking ancestors, and I started to work on improving my Welsh language skills and learn, hoping to honour my roots. This is something I have been passionate about including in my outreach role for Blaenau Gwent libraries.”



The library service in Blaenau Gwent have been trying to offer more events and activities that focus on the Welsh language. They already have a Welsh group (Clwb Cymraeg) on Wednesdays at the Abertillery site, and at the same place soon there will be a [Cylch Ti a Fi](#) (Welsh Play Group) with early years partners, [Mudiad Meithrin](#). The group will be for children under school age to play, sing, make and just enjoy themselves in a relaxed, friendly, safe environment. You don’t need to speak Welsh as all activities are bilingual and will help with moving onto the Cylch Meithrin and onto Welsh education.

The library has been expanding their Welsh language books for children and adults, which include the adult learner’s series ‘[Amdani Series](#)’. The enthusiastic staff at the library have also been busy embracing our days of cultural significance as can be seen below on the following page.



Blaina Library also showcases books about important people in our Welsh culture to inspire children who come to the library to be proud of Wales.



Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Mynyw

Menter Iaith are an organisation dedicated solely to the promotion and facilitation of the Welsh language. [Our Menter](#) also covers the Torfaen and Mynyw (Monmouthshire) area giving us ample opportunities to engage with our neighbouring authorities through the medium of Welsh. Below are just a small number of events Menter Iaith have hosted in Blaenau Gwent during this reporting period.



2.5 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022/32

The successful delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is crucial in terms of meeting Welsh Governments target of reaching 1 million speakers within Wales by 2050. The plan also plays a significant role in achieving the objectives set out within Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councils Promotion Strategy. Objective two of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy aims “to increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people and to increase their awareness of the value of the language”. Therefore we believe it essential that an brief overview of the plan and it’s developments is included within this report, if you would like to read the plan in it’s entirety it can be found [here](#).

The Education Team produce a review against the WESP every year the most recent review report can be found [here](#).

Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic 10-Year Plan 2022-2032 was approved in July 2022 by Welsh Ministers for implementation in September 2022. The plan is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government’s and the Council’s Welsh Language strategic frameworks. The strategic priorities highlighted in the WESP 10-year document can be summarised as follows:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2032 by 11% to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year’s provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Continue to increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.
- Open a Seedling Welsh-medium Primary provision in Sirhowy Tredegar on Chartist Way for September 2024 with Nursery and Reception Pupils being admitted September 2023 on a temporary school site in Ty Bedwellty.
- Work regionally with Southeast Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision.
- Improving Welsh medium learner outcomes so learners raise aspirations and improve their life chances.

The Blaenau Gwent WESP 10-year plan came into force in September 2022 with Welsh Government Approval. Blaenau Gwent has been able to set ambitious but

realistic targets for the short-, medium- and long-term developments. Alongside a review of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation are reviewed and strengthened on an annual basis, there is a robust monitoring form and delivery plan to support the success of promoting Welsh-medium education.

The WEF meetings happen every term and have been praised by Welsh Government and colleagues for their strong partnership working. They also have specific workshops on Communication plans and subgroup outcomes according to the WESP 10-year plan.

Partners commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which in turn has had a positive impact upon membership, attendance, and outcomes. In addition, the Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change is the chair of the Regional Planning of School Places and Demand Sub-group of the WEF Strategic Forum. The group meets quarterly and considers the following areas of work:

- Regional Promotion and Communication Strategy Development
- Monitoring the Demand for and Uptake of Welsh-medium Education Places
- Regional Review of Welsh-medium Secondary School Provision
- Welsh Medium Grant and Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Proposals and Projects
- WESP and WEF Updates
- Immersion

The Council has updated its webpages to inform the wider community of the advantages of being Bilingual to support the WEF collaborative booklet called ‘Becoming Bilingual’ which promotes the benefits of speaking Welsh and English.

The document is reviewed annually and shared with the families of prospective pupils. The booklet is also linked to the admissions process and is shared via health professionals, early year’s settings, schools, and other relevant partners and professionals, to promote Welsh language opportunities and education locally. Newport County Borough Council designed the layout of the ‘Becoming Bilingual’ booklets for all the South East Wales Consortia and are currently in the process of reviewing the structure, following this we will be able to update our information following

the same formatting. With the current booklets next mailout being scheduled in April 2024 using the live births data.

Blaenau Gwent 2023/24 self-assessment against key progress was sustained at Amber, with the rate of completion against the new action plan as follows:

- 13% (19 actions) are complete
- 88% (108 actions) are in progress
- 10% (12 actions) have been completed

Continued management and monitoring are required to ensure that the plan and targets are reflective of need, and that the key objectives are achieved within each delivery plan period. Some of the main achievements in the last academic session include:

1. Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar opened in September 2023 in a temporary location – Ty Bedwellty, for pupils of Nursery and Reception ages. Numbers are positive with the school in the first year having 12 pupils on roll for Nursery and Reception. In September 2024, the numbers on roll are 12, with a second classroom available on the temporary site to accommodate new admissions until the new building is ready to be occupied in Spring 2025.
2. Blaenau Gwent has successfully delivered against the Welsh Government Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B programme for remodelling works at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg in Autumn term 2022. The education transformation team are awaiting an official opening date for Ministers which is scheduled for May 2023. In addition, Education is taking forward a project to create a 210 place Welsh-medium primary school Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar an umbrella of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg. Along with an associated childcare facility within the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley on Chartist Way, which will be ready for occupation in the Spring of 2025. See page 42 for a selection of images of the students currently making the most of their time at Ty Bedwellty and the planned finished look of Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar.
3. An additional teacher and teaching assistant have been recruited to start working at the temporary location for Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar in Ty Bedwellty, due to start in September 2024.

4. Blaenau Gwent Council has developed a strong marketing and communication plan, targeting and promoting the benefits of being bilingual, whilst also establishing appropriate methods of engagement and consultation with stakeholders, in order to inform key strategic priorities. With plans for a further leaflet and bookmark drop around the benefits of bilingualism and the new seedling provision in Sirhowy, Tredegar planned for summer 2024 to cover across Blaenau Gwent.

5. The Welsh in Education Forum meet termly to discuss progress against the objectives set out within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Two of the Welsh in Education Forums were held a Ty Bedwellty, giving members the opportunity to visit the temporary classroom on location. During this reporting period monitoring groups have been set up and assigned specific objectives to report against their assigned objectives. The Communications Sub-Group made up of key partners, education and council officers have continued to meet by-monthly, with membership having increased over the course of the year. The group work collectively to share up coming events and resources that support in the delivery of the WESP objectives and develop communication materials that aid the promotion of Welsh in education and the opportunities present in Blaenau Gwent.

6. Sabbatical Welsh figures are continue to increase annually with school staff uptake of courses increasing year on year demonstrating a continued commitment to the Welsh language.

Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar Students in their temporary classroom in Ty Bedwellty – follow @YGTredegar on Twitter to keep up to date with the development on the new school!



Plans for the Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar’s building

In the past few months we have seen exciting progress on the building, the students and teachers were able to do a site visit. The children had an exciting day seeing the structure of the building coming together as the steel has been erected. The students even had the chance to sign their names on the steel, leaving their mark permanently on in the foundations of this site as our young pioneers for Welsh medium education.

February 2024



Early March



Spring 2024



Planned finished project



Blaenau Gwent 10 Year Plan

Blaenau Gwent Council's Vision for Welsh-medium Education is as follows:

'To build upon the strong progress made to date, by creating a sustainable education system which enhances provision, uptake, and use of the Welsh language; creating skilled and empowered citizens who are proud to live and work both within and outside of Wales'.

The strategic aim of which will be to create:

'A community who embrace the Welsh language and culture with confidence and pride'. We will seek to achieve our vision by promoting, developing, and enhancing Welsh-medium education provision and services. We will do so by working closely with the Welsh in Education Forum, along with other key strategic partners including Welsh Government, and other Local Authorities. Our strategic objectives include:

- To raise the profile of Welsh medium Education, along with the benefits of being bilingual.
- To create high quality, thriving learning establishments which support effective pupil, staff, community, and partner engagement.
- To support integration of services and create an immersive experience for learners.
- To secure improved school to school and partnership work, facilitating wider use and development of the Welsh language.
- To create a skilled and sustainable workforce, committed to continuing professional development.
- To ensure inclusive teaching and learning environments and opportunities for all learners; and,
- To improve progression opportunities by reviewing and implementing a curriculum which is firmly aligned to further and higher education.

The Council seeks to achieve the following outcomes as set out by Welsh Government, which reflect the learner's education journey, and are consistent with the policy areas of Cymraeg 2050 and Education in Wales: Our National Mission:

Outcome 1

More nursery children/three-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 2

More reception class children/five-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 3

More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another.

Outcome 4

More learners study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects

through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 5

More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school.

Outcome 6

An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) (in accordance with the duties imposed by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

Outcome 7

Increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh (as a subject) and teach through the medium of Welsh.

To achieve our vision and objectives, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is committed to working towards the ambitious Welsh Government target, to increase the Year 1 cohort taught via the medium of Welsh to 75 pupils. When compared with the 2019/20 baseline data used by Welsh Government, this would equate to 10% (an increase of 6 percentage points increase) of the total Year 1 cohort being taught via the medium of Welsh by 2032.

Immersion Grant

Education, in partnership with a specialist contractor, the school and Welsh Government, has developed dedicated immersion provision within Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, to accommodate late comers to Welsh-medium education. The 2021/22 pilot was a success and Welsh Government extended the programme for a further 3 years inviting Local Authorities to submit expressions of interests. Blaenau Gwent secured additional funding for a class teacher for 3 years with some small capital expenditure to promote immersion over both Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg and the seedling school in Sirhowy, Tredegar.

In line with the delivery of the project the Council worked closely with neighbouring authorities to compare models of immersion provision, identify, and address any gaps, whilst also gauging and developing best practice. In addition, the project has contributed to the development of the communication and promotion plan working in partnership with the BG WEF, in turn supporting implementation of the new provision in line with the BG WESP.

Please see the wonderful video created in partnership with Rhieni dros Addysg Gymreag (Parents for Welsh Education) that offers you a real life insight into the success of the immersion unit and a glimpse of the facilities available.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6pWTphOwww>

Additional Learning Needs

In addition, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Primary School are planning on implementing a special needs resource base (SNRB) for up to 15 ALN pupils in line with the recent Additional Learning Needs Consultation. The Council are able to provide capital expenditure in 2024/25 to enable a classroom to be converted to be a resource base to support a wider ALN direction of providing ALN support for Welsh-medium learners from 2024.

During the reporting period 5 new members of staff have been recruited for the 'Canolfan y Noddfa', which is the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) centre in Ysgol Bro Helyg for this coming September.

Cymraeg i Bawb

Website launch and Conference at Ty Bedwellty

Cymraeg i Bawb is project funded by Welsh Government with partners contributing in kind to support the promotion and increase the engagement with Welsh education.

The South East Wales Welsh Medium Education Promotion Partnership and Llio Elgar as the Pencampwr (Champion) are responsible for Cymraeg i Bawb.. The partnership consists of Local Authorities, Mentrau Iaith, Cymraeg i Blant, RhAG (Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg/Parents for Welsh Education) and the Welsh Government in south-east Wales. The project was initiated by [Grŵp Deddf](#) – South East Wales Welsh officers, seeing the potential in working together as an established collective to Welsh-medium education.



The Policy Team provided content for Blaenau Gwent's page on the [Cymraeg i Bawb](#) website that was launched in February 2024. The new website was presented at the first Cymraeg i Bawb conference held on the 15th of March 2024 in our very own Ty Bedwellty. This location was of course chosen with it being the temporary location for the students of Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar.

Parental engagement at Cwm Flying Start

A group of parents from Cwm who use the Flying Start facilities have decided to learn Welsh to support their children's bilingual education. They will attend a three-week course provided by Learn Welsh Cymru starting on Thursday 6th June.

The course will introduce the learners to the basic skills of Welsh, such as greetings, introductions, numbers, colours, and everyday family phrases. The course is designed to give them a foundation for further learning and to help them communicate with their children in Welsh. The course is free and open to all Flying Start families in Cwm.

The parents expressed their interest in learning Welsh after seeing a social media post by Flying Start, which offers a range of services for families with children under four, such as childcare, health visiting, parenting support and early language development. Many of the parents have children who attend Welsh-medium schools or nurseries, and they want to join them in their bilingual journey.

"This is a lovely idea, it's nice to see people's interest in the Welsh language".

"I am really interested in attending a course. My child is 4 years and keeps correcting me when I try to speak Welsh".

Commented two of the parents.

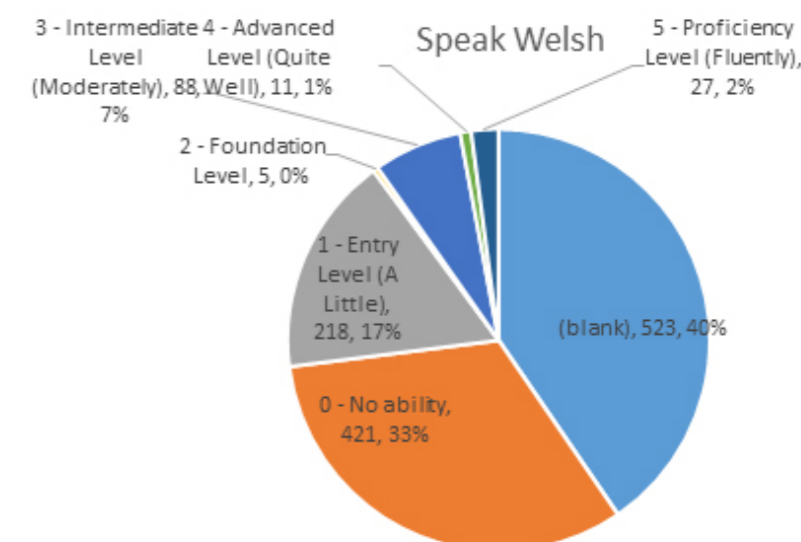
The course is delivered by Dysgu Cymraeg Cymru, which is the national provider of Welsh courses for adults in Wales. They offer courses at all levels, from beginners to advanced, in various locations and formats. They also provide online resources and activities to support learners' progress.

Blaenau Gwent Council are delighted that the Flying Start families are being supported to learn Welsh. These group of parents exemplify the fact that it's never too late to start learning a new language, and it can bring many benefits, such as improving your confidence, mental health and your career prospects. Learning Welsh can also strengthen your bond with your children and your community.

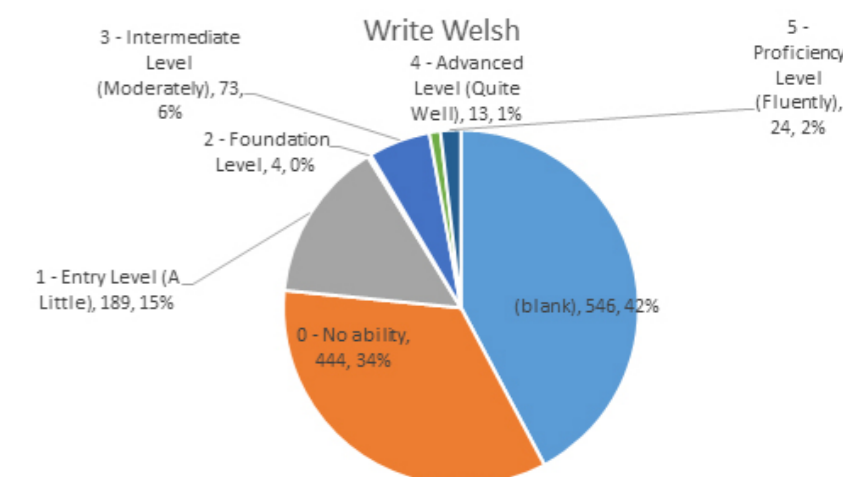


School-Based Staff Data via Organisational Development Platform

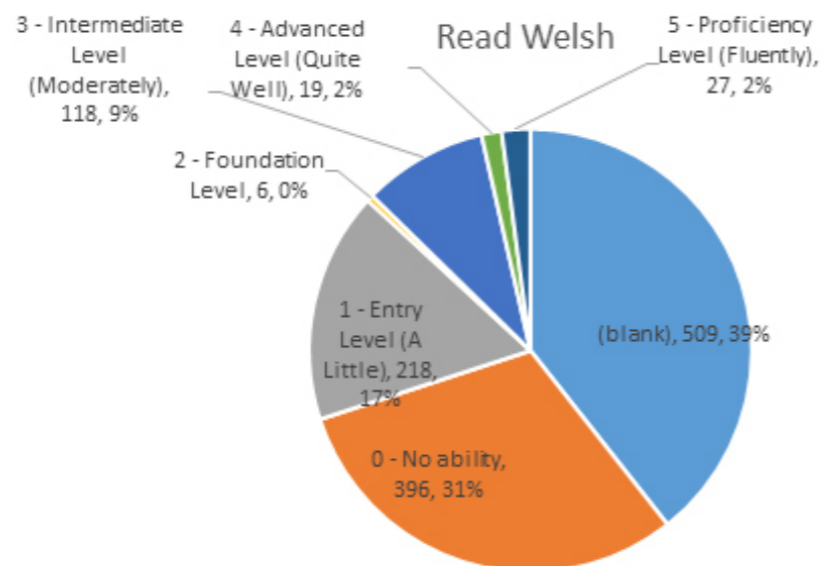
Ability to Speak in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	218
Foundation	5
Intermediate (Moderately)	88
Advanced (Quite Well)	11
Proficient (Fluently)	27
No Ability	421
No Response	523
Total	1,293



Ability to Write in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	189
Foundation	4
Intermediate (Moderately)	73
Advanced (Quite Well)	13
Proficient (Fluently)	24
No Ability	444
No Response	546
Total	1,293



Ability to Speak in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	218
Foundation	6
Intermediate (Moderately)	118
Advances (Quite Well)	19
Proficient (Fluently)	27
No Ability	396
No Response	509
Total	1,293



Amongst Blaenau Gwent’s School based staff, data shows an increase with some level of ability to write in Welsh with 17 additional members having reported to have some level of ability. The ability to read at some level in Welsh has increased by 102 members of staff in 2024. Equating to an 8% increase against the data for 2023. Speaking Welsh has seen a slight increase in 2024 with 9 additional staff members reporting an ability to speak some Welsh. The number of main language Welsh users within schools has seen a slight increase in 2024 with 1 additional member reporting as such.

Complaints from the public

Corporate Compliments & Complaints Procedure

During this reporting period a total of 0 complaints were received via Corporate Compliments & Complaints regarding service delivery standards; policy making standards; or operational standards.

The Corporate Compliments & Complaints procedure is available for anyone who wishes to make a complaint related to compliance with the Welsh Language Standards and is used to help us identify and make any required service delivery changes. The procedure provides information on how people can refer a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales as well as the Welsh Language Commissioner’s Office. Complaints can be made in any format (e.g., email, letter, in person, telephone, social media etc.).

While the Council has not received any complaints directly, we are assisting our partners at Aneurin Leisure Trust with a complaint raised concerning the lack of Welsh signage at one of their parks. The complaint was sent by a member of the public directly to the Welsh Language Commissioners Office. While the Trust has already taken steps to rectify the issue, the matter is still open with the Commissioner’s Office and we are awaiting determination of actions taken.

Update on Standard Compliance Investigation CS092

In November 2021 The Welsh Language Commissioners Office (WLCO) opened the CS092 investigation following conducting mystery calls to our main telephone lines. The WLCO felt that the Council had fallen short in complying with Standards 8-22 surrounding how calls are made and received by the Council.

As a result of the concerns raised the WLCO did further research into the Council’s compliance with other standards. This research in turn widened their terms of reference and resulted in an official investigation into our compliance.

The investigation covered the following standards:

Topic	Related Standards
Telephone Services	Standards 8, 11, 17
Training Provision	Standards 130, 131, 132, 133
Recruitment Process’	Standards 127, 136, 136a
Promotion of Welsh Language Services	Standard 81

In September 2022 the WLCO provided the Council with a final determination that outlines the steps required to reach standard compliance and expected delivery timeframes. This determination notice, also requested that the Council created an Action Plan that sets out these steps and establishes both timeframes and accountability.

The Council’s Leadership Team made the decision to establish an organisation wide ‘CS092 Core Officers Group’ to support the Policy Team with the development and subsequent delivery of the Action Plan.

The group were responsible for:

- Holding a root and branch review of the arrangements for complying with the Service Delivery Standards that are included within the investigation
- Preparing a plan for how the organisation will ensure compliance with the Operational Standards across the organisation

- Identifying human resource requirements on how the Council is going to ensure adequate resources to comply with the Telephone Standards;
- Increasing the level of understanding across the organisation of the requirements of the standards relevant to the investigation (with reference to the language skills assessment, Welsh language training and assessing the language needs of posts)
- Preparation, development, and subsequent implementation of the CS092 Action Plan.

The Council submitted the Action Plan to the WLCO on the 31st of January 2023, and received approval in March 2023.

All actions have been completed with the exception of the following

Action S132.1b : Welsh language training package to be made available to all staff via the Council’s new e-learning portal (currently being commissioned).

Action S132.2a : Develop procedure for ensuring Welsh language training is repeated periodically via e-learning portal (including refresher training)

Unfortunately, the launch of the new e-learning portal has been delayed due to some technical issues outside of the Council’s control. Despite the portal itself not being available to staff yet the training itself has been created and will be accessible via the portal as soon as it is live for staff. As detailed in section 2.3 of this report further training has been uploaded to the intranet to compensate for the delayed launch of the portal.

Reflection on actions taken

Although it was disappointing to face an investigation, we believe that the work that followed as a result has been extremely beneficial. The opportunities for improvement has allowed us to evaluate how we as Council work internally and in providing our services to the public, and they enhanced our awareness of the obligation we have as an organisation to comply with the Welsh Language Standards. As we implemented this action plan, we also noticed other areas for improvement that needed our attention and we were able to address them more effectively.

Next Steps

We want to maintain the progress that the steps taken have created and will continue close monitoring of the Councils work in adhering to the Welsh language standards as we move ahead. The core group that has been meeting every six weeks since the initial notice from the WLCO has proven valuable and we plan to keep the group active. Our Corporate Leadership Team has decided that we should continue to have regular meetings to keep track of Welsh language developments, staying aware of any challenges that need solving to ensure we are working as well and as quickly as possible. We will be looking at the membership of this group and are eager to continue to enhance the Council’s compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.

3. Staff language skills

Over the past year we have made many significant changes and feel an improved sense of appreciation for the language and a rise in interest in all things Welsh. We are trying to increase the use of Welsh within workplace from encouraging use in emails, to using incidental Welsh in meetings and promoting ‘Courtesy level Welsh’ and days like Diwrnod Shwmae.

Diwrnod SHWMAE SU'MAE Day

RHO GYNNIG ARNI!
GIVE IT A GO!

What is Diwrnod Shwmae?

Diwrnod Shwmae is a day to celebrate the Welsh Language. The idea is on this day we should all try starting our conversations with shwmae, su'mae or shwdi!

15TH OCTOBER 2023

The event aims to show that the Welsh language belongs to us all – fluent speakers, learners or those shy about their Welsh.

How can you use Welsh in the workplace?

There are a number of recourses on the intranet under ‘Welsh language guidance’.

Make sure to run through the ‘Bilingual Greetings & Useful Phrases’ slides to put to use in your meetings and emails!

Siarad Cymraeg
Speak Welsh

Blaenau Gwent
Quality through Growth

Cymraeg

Standard 127

A body must assess the Welsh language skills of its employees

Under Standard 127 all Councils in Wales must keep a record of it's staffs Welsh language skills. We record this data via our Organisational Development portal iTrent. Reminders have been sent frequently throughout the year to keep this information up to date, including a request from the Chief Executive to all staff as can be see below:

Update your iTrent

Following Diwrnod Shwmae Day which was on the 15th October 2023, I want to express how keen we are to better our engagement with the Welsh language as a Council. We have a duty to work in accordance with the Welsh Language Standards and part of this requirement is to report our staff's Welsh language skills on an annual basis.

Therefore, I am kindly requesting **all staff** take the time to complete their mandatory 'sensitive information' section on iTrent ([My Info Employee Self Service](#)). Completing this information accurately will give us a more accurate understanding of our staff's equality information which includes your Welsh Language skills, which in turn will enable us to improve the provision of services through the Welsh Language and better understand the protected characteristics of our staff.

Furthermore, I would like to use this opportunity to encourage all staff to consider completing some Welsh language training, please see training options below.

[Learn Welsh Self Study Course \(with tutor support available\)](#)
[Learn Welsh Short Courses](#)

You're more skilled than you realise

If you can say simple greetings, phrases and place names in Welsh you're already at Level 1.

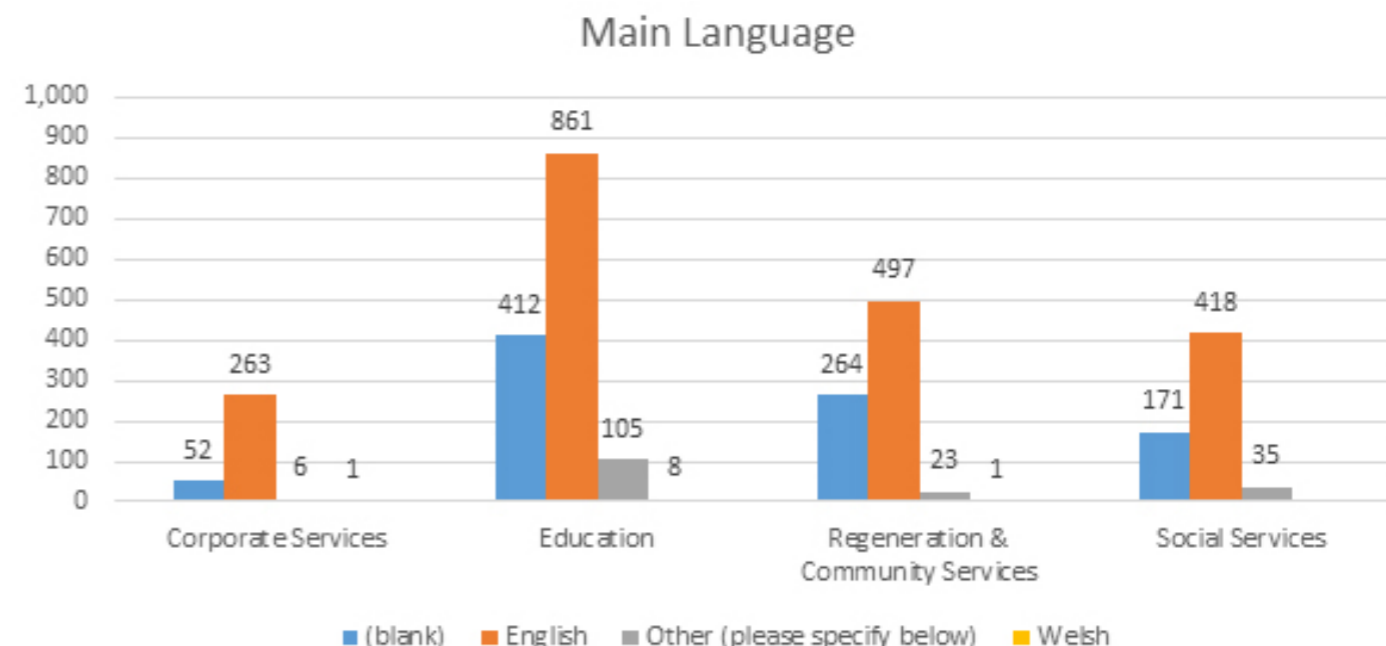
Make sure to include this on your iTrent profile.

The Council is very interested in your potential - see the Welsh language training procedure on the intranet for further information.

Welsh Language Skills

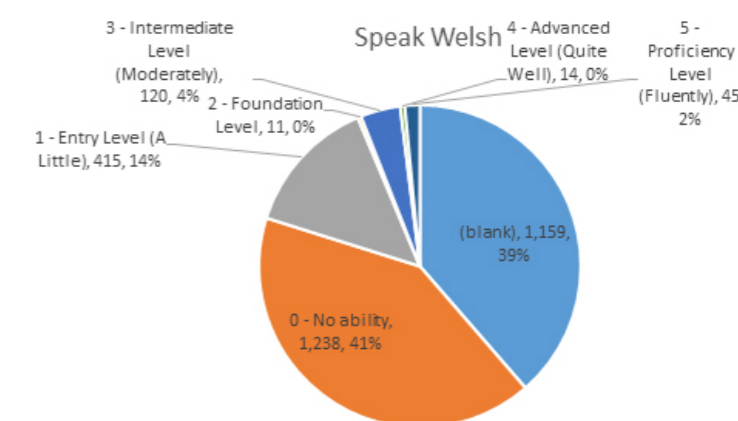
Organisation Wide Overview

The number of main language Welsh speakers has remained stable amongst those providing language information in comparison to last years data as presented below.

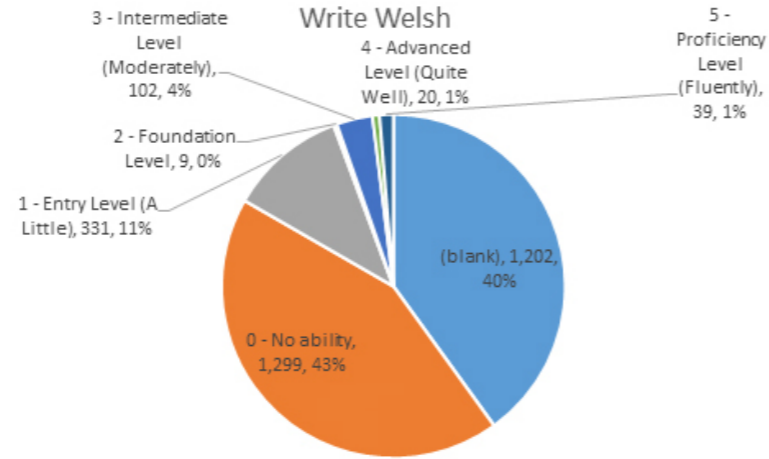


The pie charts below present the data as of the 30th of March 2024 for all Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council employees:

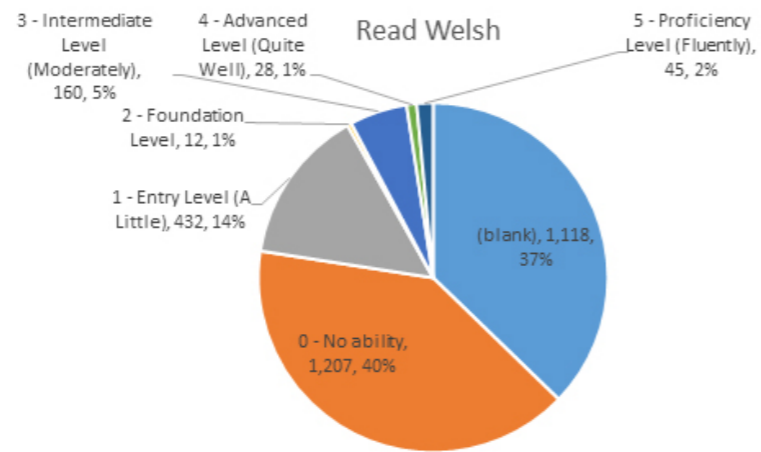
Ability to Speak in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	415
Foundation	11
Intermediate (Moderately)	120
Advanced (Quite Well)	14
Proficient (Fluently)	45
No Ability	1,238
No Response	1,159
Total	3,002



Ability to Write in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	331
Foundation	9
Intermediate (Moderately)	102
Advanced (Quite Well)	20
Proficient (Fluently)	39
No Ability	1,299
No Response	1,202
Total	3,002

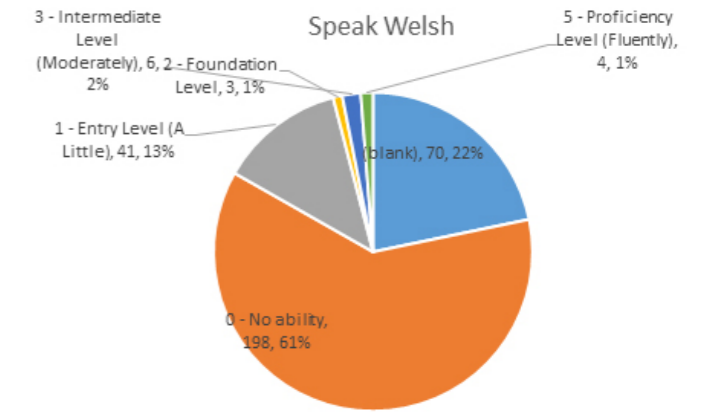


Ability to Read in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	432
Foundation	12
Intermediate (Moderately)	160
Advanced (Quite Well)	28
Proficient (Fluently)	45
No Ability	1,207
No Response	1,118
Total	3,002

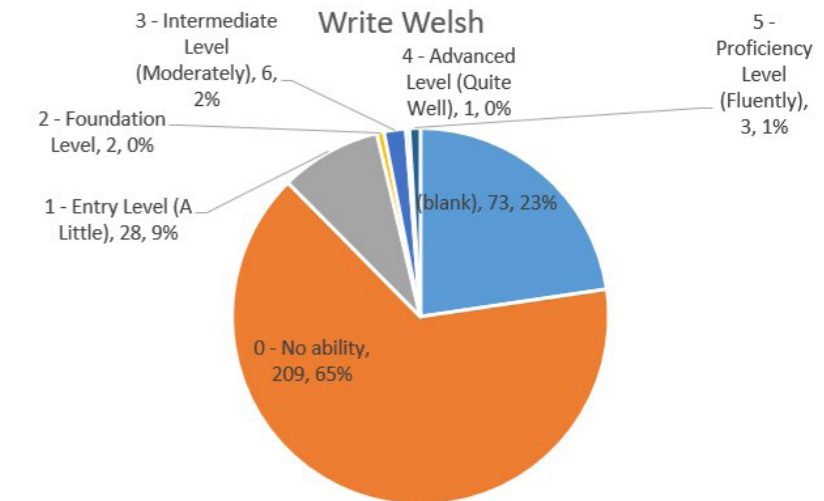


Corporate Services

Ability to Speak in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	41
Foundation	3
Intermediate (Moderately)	6
Proficient (Fluently)	4
No Ability	198
No Response	70
Total	322

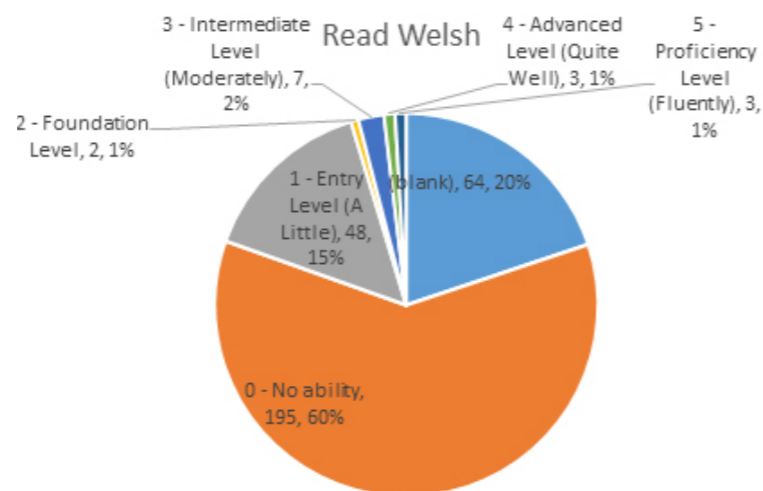


Ability to Write in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	51
Foundation	1
Intermediate (Moderately)	5
Advanced (Quite Well)	2
Proficient (Fluently)	5
No Ability	396
No Response	325
Total	785



Employees within the organisation have shown an increase in written Welsh ability overall, with an additional 56 individuals indicating some written Welsh skills. Those indicating an ability to read in Welsh to some level has similarly increased with a further 232 members of staff reporting as such within the given data. An increase of 68 individuals have reported an ability to speak Welsh within the report.

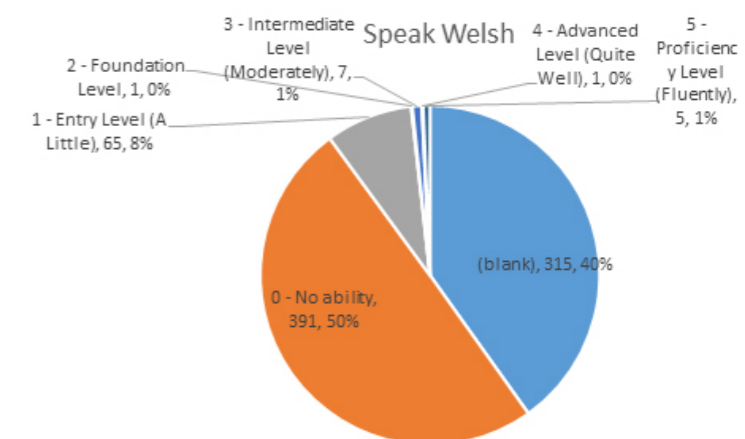
Ability to Read in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	48
Foundation	2
Intermediate (Moderately)	7
Advanced (Quite Well)	3
Proficient (Fluently)	3
No Ability	195
No Response	64
Total	322



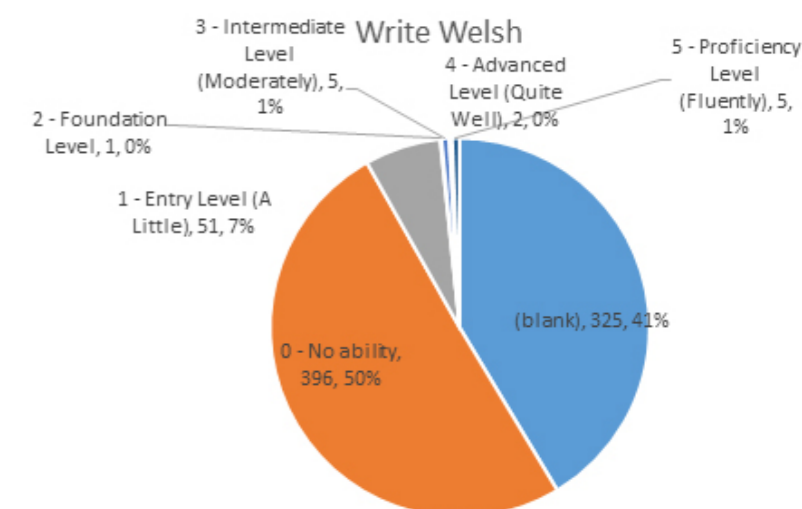
All areas of Welsh ability within Corporate Services have seen an increase year on year. Ability to write some level of Welsh has increased by 13 individuals (4%). Those with some level of reading ability has had a significant increase in 2024 with an additional 36 individuals. This equates to a 12% increase in those indicating some level of reading ability. An additional 20 members have reported an ability to speak Welsh (7% increase) in 2024. The number of main language Welsh users has remained constant with 1 individual.

Regeneration and Community

Ability to Speak in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	65
Foundation	1
Intermediate (Moderately)	7
Advanced (Quite Well)	1
Proficient (Fluently)	5
No Ability	391
No Response	315
Total	785

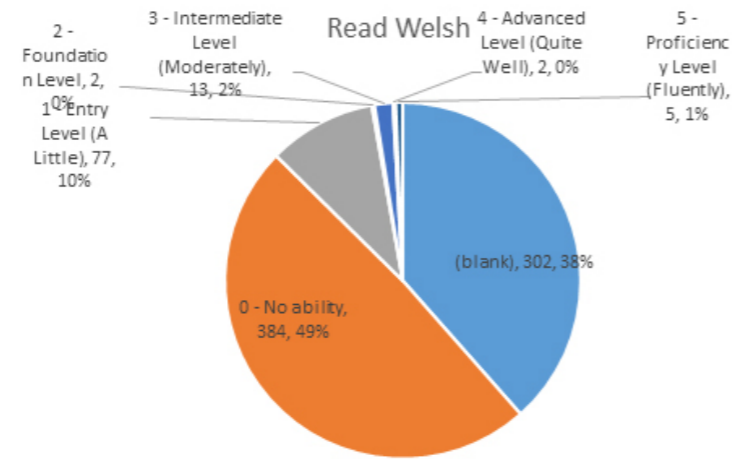


Ability to Write in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	51
Foundation	1
Intermediate (Moderately)	5
Advanced (Quite Well)	2
Proficient (Fluently)	5
No Ability	396
No Response	325
Total	785



Staff language skills

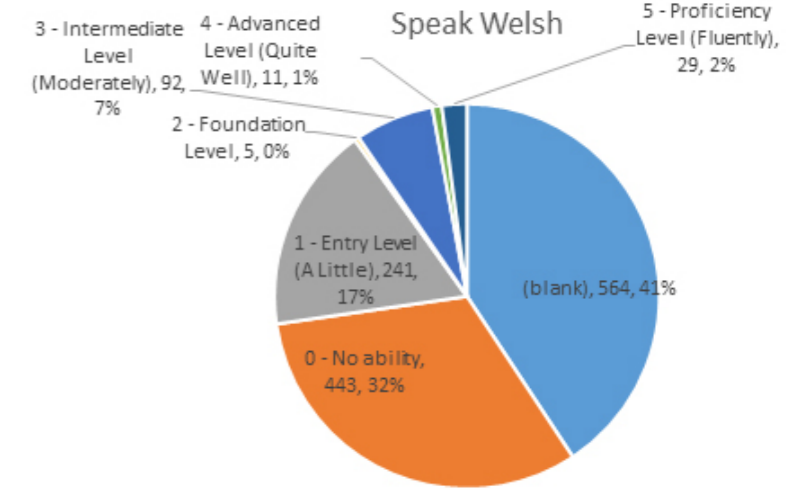
Ability to Read in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	77
Foundation	2
Intermediate (Moderately)	13
Advanced (Quite Well)	2
Proficient (Fluently)	5
No Ability	384
No Response	302
Total	785



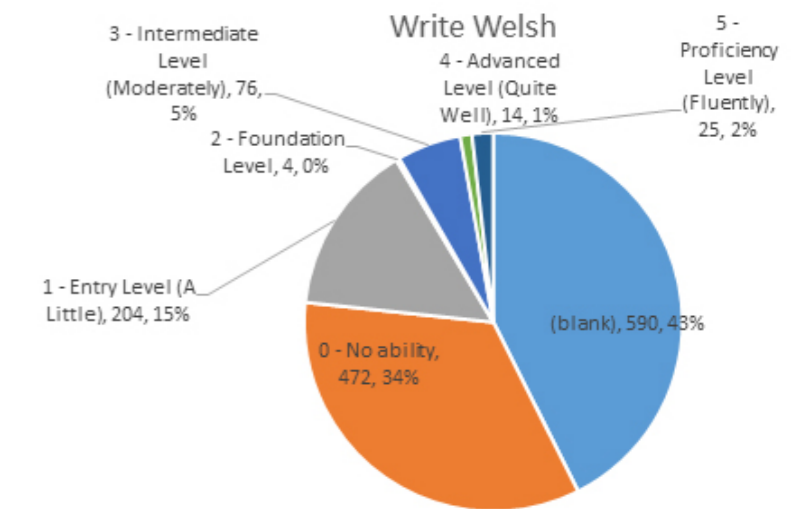
Within Regeneration and Community all areas of Welsh have seen an increase within 2024. An additional 9 individuals (2%) indicate some level of writing ability. A further 44 individuals have reported some level of reading ability, while 10 more members have reported some level of Welsh speaking skill. The number of main language Welsh users has remained stable with 1 individual identifying Welsh as their main language.

Education

Ability to Read in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	241
Foundation	5
Intermediate (Moderately)	92
Advanced (Quite Well)	11
Proficient (Fluently)	29
No Ability	443
No Response	564
Total	1,385

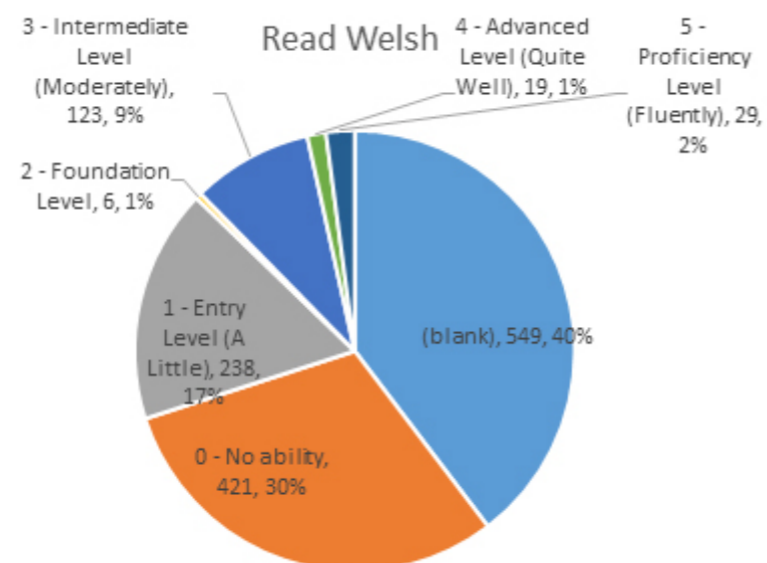


Ability to Write in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	204
Foundation	4
Intermediate (Moderately)	76
Advanced (Quite Well)	14
Proficient (Fluently)	25
No Ability	472
No Response	590
Total	1,385



Staff language skills

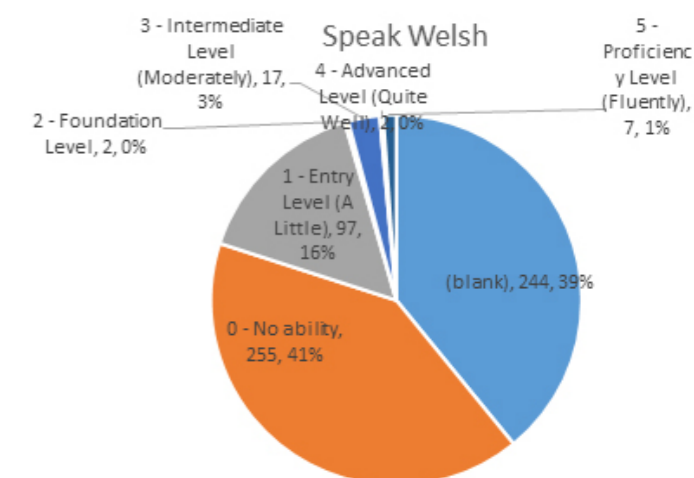
Ability to Read in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	238
Foundation	6
Intermediate (Moderately)	123
Advanced (Quite Well)	19
Proficient (Fluently)	29
No Ability	421
No Response	549
Total	1,385



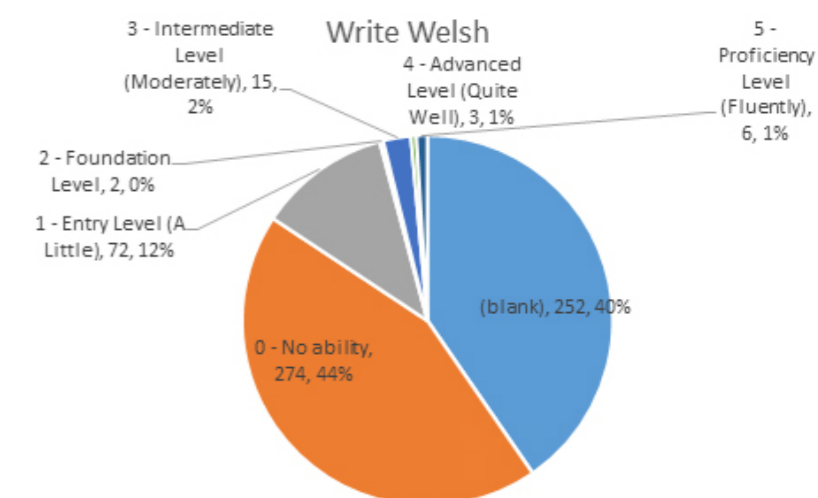
Education (including school based staff) there has been a slight increase indicating an ability to write some Welsh. Data shows an additional 17 individuals feel they can write some level of Welsh. Reading Welsh shows a pleasing increase in 2024 with an additional 139 having some ability to read Welsh compared to the 2023 data. 19 more members of staff have stated they can speak some level of Welsh in 2024 in comparison to 2023. The number of main language Welsh users has seen an increase of 1 individual within the education directorate.

Social Services

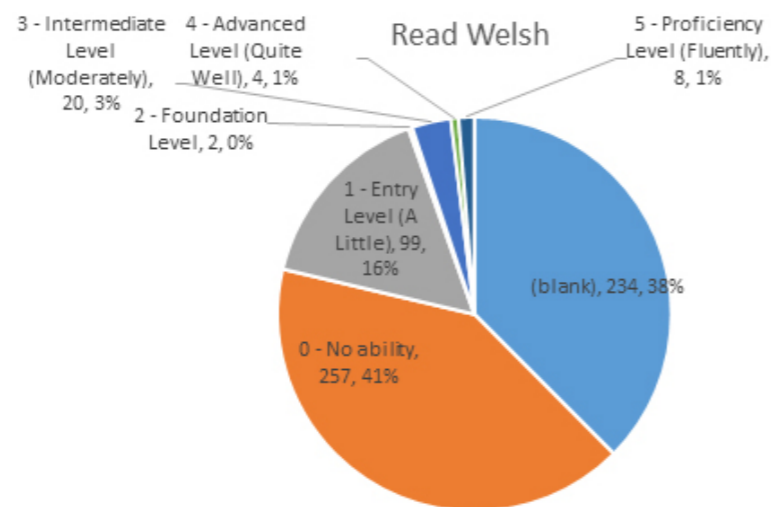
Ability to Speak in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	97
Foundation	2
Intermediate (Moderately)	17
Advanced (Quite Well)	2
Proficient (Fluently)	7
No Ability	255
No Response	244
Total	624



Ability to Write in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	72
Foundation	2
Intermediate (Moderately)	15
Advanced (Quite Well)	3
Proficient (Fluently)	6
No Ability	274
No Response	252
Total	624

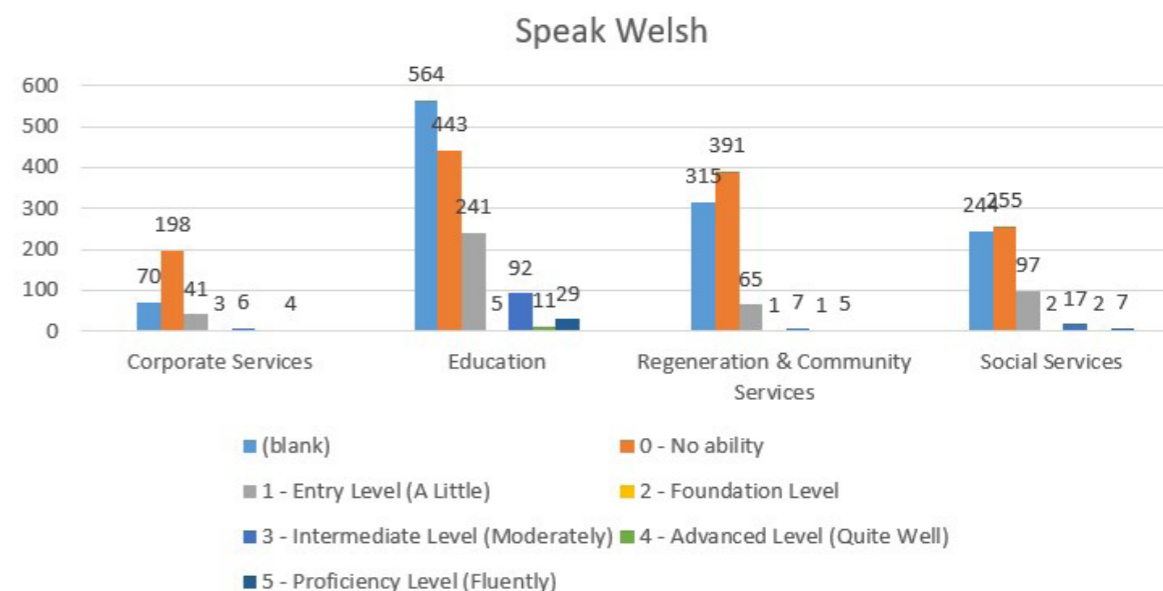


Ability to Read in Welsh	Number of Staff
Courtesy / Entry Level	99
Foundation	2
Intermediate (Moderately)	20
Advanced (Quite Well)	4
Proficient (Fluently)	8
No Ability	257
No Response	234
Total	624



Welsh Speakers by Directorate

The following bar chart breaks down Welsh speaking ability by directorate.



Each area of Welsh language skills recorded has seen an increase within the reported figures from social services. Some level of written Welsh ability has increased by 15 individuals (3%), some level of reading ability has seen an increase of 50 individuals (7%) in comparison to 2023. Spoken Welsh has similarly seen an increase in those reporting some level of ability, with a further 21 members recording some level of spoken Welsh (3%). There has been a slight increase in Welsh as a main language with 2 more members of staff reporting as such.

A total of 45 members of staff declare their ability as fluent under Welsh speaking skills, this is an increase of 11 members of staff in comparison to 2021-22 figures. This increase is consistent across the Council, with figures rising in all directorates. As reported last year the Education directorate has the highest number of fluent speakers with 29 members of staff.

4. Welsh medium training provision

Staff Training

0 courses (available online) were delivered through the medium of Welsh, although this option is made available to staff if requested.

Welsh Training

Promotion to team managers, council Members, and directly to all staff is something that we do frequently throughout the year. We promote the materials readily available to staff via the intranet and the training options available via Dysgu Cymraeg, highlighting staff right to lend working hours to such training under Standard 130. This year 17 additional members of staff have completed online courses through Dysgu Cymraeg. With 10 members of customer facing staff having received tutor led virtual training, with a number of them signing up for further tutor led training to begin in September 2024.

Lunchtime Welsh conversation sessions have been set up that offer a place for Council employees of all level of Welsh language ability to practice their speaking Welsh with fluent speakers. Member engagement with these sessions has been positive, not only in terms of the language but also with discussing the developments happening around the Welsh language to ensure that these positive steps are being shared when members are interacting with the public within all aspects of their work. For those members who have already undertaken Welsh training we are supporting further training and encouraging other members to undertake Welsh language training.

Furthermore, 100 members of staff have received training from the new Welsh Language Support Officer. The aim of these session is to not only support effective working in line with the Welsh language requirements set upon the Council but preserve our linguistic heritage by encouraging the use of incidental Welsh, attendance at informal Welsh sessions currently being held and sign up for formal Welsh language training.

Early Years Training Programme

Our Early Years and Childcare team have been working hard to support the success against the Welsh Governments aim is to achieve a million Welsh speakers by 2050, The Curriculum for Non-Maintained Settings states 'we should recognise and value the Welsh language as an integral part of the unique culture of Wales, and as a language which should be taught in all settings in Wales.' The team have been delivering incidental Welsh training to increase the amount of Welsh our youngest children are exposed to enabling them to grow up with a positive and confident attitude towards learning and using the language.

The **Introduction to Incidental Welsh Training** will support practitioners to become confident in using basic Welsh language within their settings. The sessions cover how to adopt basic Welsh language into your setting's daily routines, simple adaptations you can make to work towards Childcare Inspectorate Wales's Active Offer as well as offer ideas for songs, rhymes, and activities to use with the children in your care. A Welsh language activity resource pack is available for each setting who attends.'

Two sessions have taken place so far with 42 individuals having attended. There are three more courses are planned for the coming year, will the option of adding additional dates if the demand from the workforce identifies the need for more.

See an array of photos below that truly capture the effort and care the Team have put into these sessions:

5. Looking Forward

The Council remain committed to meeting the requirements set out within the Welsh Language standards and further promote and support compliance with the standards with the aim to continually improve our Welsh language services.

As part of our work in the forthcoming year we will continue to take forward the following key actions:

- Continue to meet with the Welsh Language Core Group following a membership review.
- Embed and monitor the progress of the CS092 investigation
- Utilize the Shared Prosperity funding received to increase Welsh language and cultural visibility within the Blaenau Gwent area.
- Work closely with local business and the Regeneration Team to celebrate [Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae](#)
- Create more informal opportunities for staff to learn and strengthen their Welsh language skills.
- Encourage more staff to undertake Welsh language training.
- Consistent reviewing and improving of internal operations in relation to the Welsh language.
- Strengthen our partnership working.
- Support the Education Team in the developments of Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar.

Over the forthcoming period we aim to continue our progress, in relation to meeting our Welsh language duties, and make any necessary improvements to ensure we deliver the best possible services for our staff, residents, partners and stakeholders.



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