

Welsh Language Skills in the Early Years and Childcare workforce

 **Cyngor Gofal Cymru**
Care Council for Wales
Hyder mewn Gofal - Confidence in Care

**WELSH
LANGUAGE
SKILLS IN YOUR
WORKFORCE**

**USING THEM
EFFECTIVELY**

'If you are a Welsh speaker, being able to use your own language has to be seen as a core component of care and not as an optional extra ...'



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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Introduction

As a provider or manager of an early years and childcare setting you will realise that being able to provide a bilingual service for children and families in Welsh depends wholly on your staff.

This resource will enable you to identify what Welsh language skills you already have within your workforce. Sometimes these are hidden through lack of confidence, being out of practice, fear of being given additional tasks e.g. translation work or because no value has been placed on them. This pack aims to help you make effective use of the skills as you would any other workplace skill, for the benefit and well-being of the children and families who use your services.

This resource aims to raise awareness of why Welsh language is important in early years and to encourage practitioners, whether they have little or no Welsh language skills and those who have a higher level of skills to use every day Welsh in their setting.

We hope that you will find the resource useful in assisting you to assess the Welsh language skills of your current workforce and assist in your future workforce planning.

The resources have been split into four sections as follows:

Section 1 – Why is the Welsh language important in early years and childcare?

Section 2 - Which Welsh language skills are needed for which roles in your setting?

Section 3 - Assessing and Recording your staff's language skills

Section 4 - Recruiting Welsh speakers to specific roles

Easy to use Language Skills Flowcharts and Language Skills Frameworks accompany this resource to help you assess your own workforce.

With thanks to members of the Early Years and Childcare Network for their valued input into this resource.

Section 1

Why is the Welsh language important in early years and childcare?

Welsh Government's vision is to see the Welsh language thriving in Wales and to see the number of Welsh speakers increase to one million by 2050¹. In *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan*² – the Welsh Government aims to support parents to raise their children bilingually and to ensure there is an adequate supply of Welsh language practitioners and services available in the early years and childcare sector.

Social Care Wales is responsible for promoting and supporting high standards across the early years and childcare workforce. Social Care Wales aims to work with employers and stakeholders so the workforce in Wales has the right skills and qualifications to work to a high professional standard, and is capable of delivering high quality service. Welsh language skills are an integral part of these skills and knowledge.

Social Care Wales provides all its resources bilingually, and draws attention to the importance of the Welsh language when working in Wales. This resource has been developed to assist providers in identifying their staff's existing Welsh language skills. The resource also has suggestions about how you can plan to ensure you have adequate Welsh language provision in your setting. It suggests some simple ideas and 'how to' steps, for example, encouraging your staff to assess their own language skills in a practical manner.

As an early years and childcare provider one of the most important skills your staff needs to have is *communication skills*. These are skills in communicating both with the children and their families, other staff members and external partners e.g. Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). Communication in the child and family's preferred language is important in order to ensure that the child's needs are met.

Children and young people have a right to express their views and influence the things that affect them using their preferred language. The communication skills that a child learns early in life will be the foundation for his or her communication abilities for the future. Strong language skills are an asset that will promote a lifetime of effective communication.

The first step is recognition that the ability to speak Welsh is a **skill** just like any other and it is to be valued and utilised in a positive manner in the workplace. Following some of the easy steps in this resource will ensure recognition by providers, managers and practitioners that the ability to speak Welsh is a valued skill.

¹ <http://gov.wales/newsroom/welshlanguage/2016/160801cymraeg/?lang=en>

² Welsh Government Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan

Section 2

Which Welsh language skills are needed for which roles and jobs in your setting?

It is not advisable to assume that English is the default language. When providing services to children and their families who usually speak Welsh, as their first language or everyday language, you should assume that they would prefer to speak Welsh with you.

Prompts for consideration:

- When you first meet the children and family, establish and record the preferred language and deliver services accordingly.
- Use this resource to help you plan to have an appropriate number of Welsh speaking staff.
- Ensure that all members of staff can show basic linguistic courtesy towards children and families and are sensitive to the language and culture of Welsh speakers. Basic linguistic courtesy requires the ability to:
 - Pronounce personal Welsh names correctly (forenames and surnames)
 - Pronounce place names correctly
 - Give simple greetings e.g. helo, bore da, croeso, sut ydych chi
 - Say some simple words and phrases
 - Respond courteously to someone who speaks in Welsh and be confident to use the skills, no matter how limited they are.

Staff can be trained to acquire these competencies – i.e. Level 1 Welsh (Speaking and Understanding) as described in the [Language Skills Framework](#) in Section 3. The exact level of skills required will vary according to the job role and the amount of contact between the practitioner and the child and family.

Jobs for which bilingual skills may be essential

To enable you to offer a bilingual service, there will be jobs where Welsh language skills are essential. These are usually jobs where the employee needs to be fluent in everyday Welsh. From time to time, the ability to write fluently in Welsh may be needed, so this skill will then become essential. The Framework allows for differentiation between spoken and written skills; for example, some jobs may require the former but not the latter.

Once you have assessed your workforce's skills you may decide that some Welsh language development and support is needed either to introduce basic standards or to develop Welsh language skills that already exist within the workforce. There are a selection of training resources available across Wales: - See more at: <http://www.ccwales.org.uk/welsh-language-training-resources/>

Being “fluent” generally refers to Level 3 or above in the [Language Skills Framework](#) in Section 3.

However, all levels of Welsh language skills are an advantage and practitioners should be encouraged to use and develop their skills.

A useful guide when considering which jobs fall into this category is to ask yourself the following question:

- Are we able to deliver Welsh language services which are equal to those in English in terms of standard, availability and ease?
- If not, how can we close the skills gap through ensuring appropriate language skills for jobs providing a service to Welsh-speaking children and their families?

Work which involves contact with children, their families or carers which is performed **individually** by a **single person** requires an appropriate level of bilingual skills – i.e. Level 3 or above – in order to provide an effective bilingual service, orally and written, without any delay or inconvenience for the child and family.

Other jobs will involve working as **part of a team**, with all team members generally performing the same duties or undertaking similar work. If the duties performed are largely the same, you will need to ensure a sufficient number of team members with Welsh language skills at Level 3 or above. Arrangements should be made to ensure that these practitioners are available to provide an effective Welsh language service as required, without any delay or inconvenience for the child and family.

The requirement for bilingual skills may therefore be relevant to an **individual post** or **to a team**, or to both.

Jobs for which bilingual skills may be desirable

If bilingual skills are not **essential**, you may decide that the ability to operate effectively in English and Welsh is **desirable** for all other jobs. How much emphasis you place on this will vary from post to post. Below are examples of criteria for laying greater emphasis on making effective bilingual skills **desirable**:

- Where it would be advantageous when providing a service for Welsh speakers, in settings where Welsh-speaking staff are already available, but where having an additional Welsh speaker would strengthen bilingual provision.
- Where it would strengthen the skills of a team or setting.
- When it would respond to the need to write short pieces of Welsh, or simple translations e.g. displays such as children’s activities.
- Where it would enhance the Welsh ethos or climate of a setting and help increase and normalise use of Welsh in the workplace.

Section 3

Assessing and recording your staff's language skills

The ability of your staff to speak Welsh is a professional skill that needs to be valued like any other professional skill they may have.

It is important to remember that bilingual people have communication skills in two languages – Welsh and English.

Within this section you will find a **Language Skills Framework** which will enable you to be clear about the exact skills levels that you will be referring to when assessing, recruiting and planning the use of your staff's skills.

A language skills framework is simply a way of assessing language skills based on the types of communication tasks (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, and understanding) which your workforce are able to undertake in Welsh.

The language skills' framework will therefore be important in the planning and implementation of your language skills strategy.

First steps: consider developing a Welsh language skills plan

A Welsh Language Skills Plan will help you manage and make the most of your practitioners existing language skills. It involves the following simple steps:

- Deciding which language skills are needed for specific roles and jobs in your setting
- Assessing and recording your staff's language skills
- Recruiting people with Welsh language skills

Guidance charts

The [Language Skills Flowcharts](#) on pages 7 and 8 provide guidance to help you decide whether fluency in Welsh as well as English is essential for a post, and which levels of fluency will be required. The first chart helps you consider whether oral Welsh language skills are needed; the second discusses the need for Welsh language writing skills.

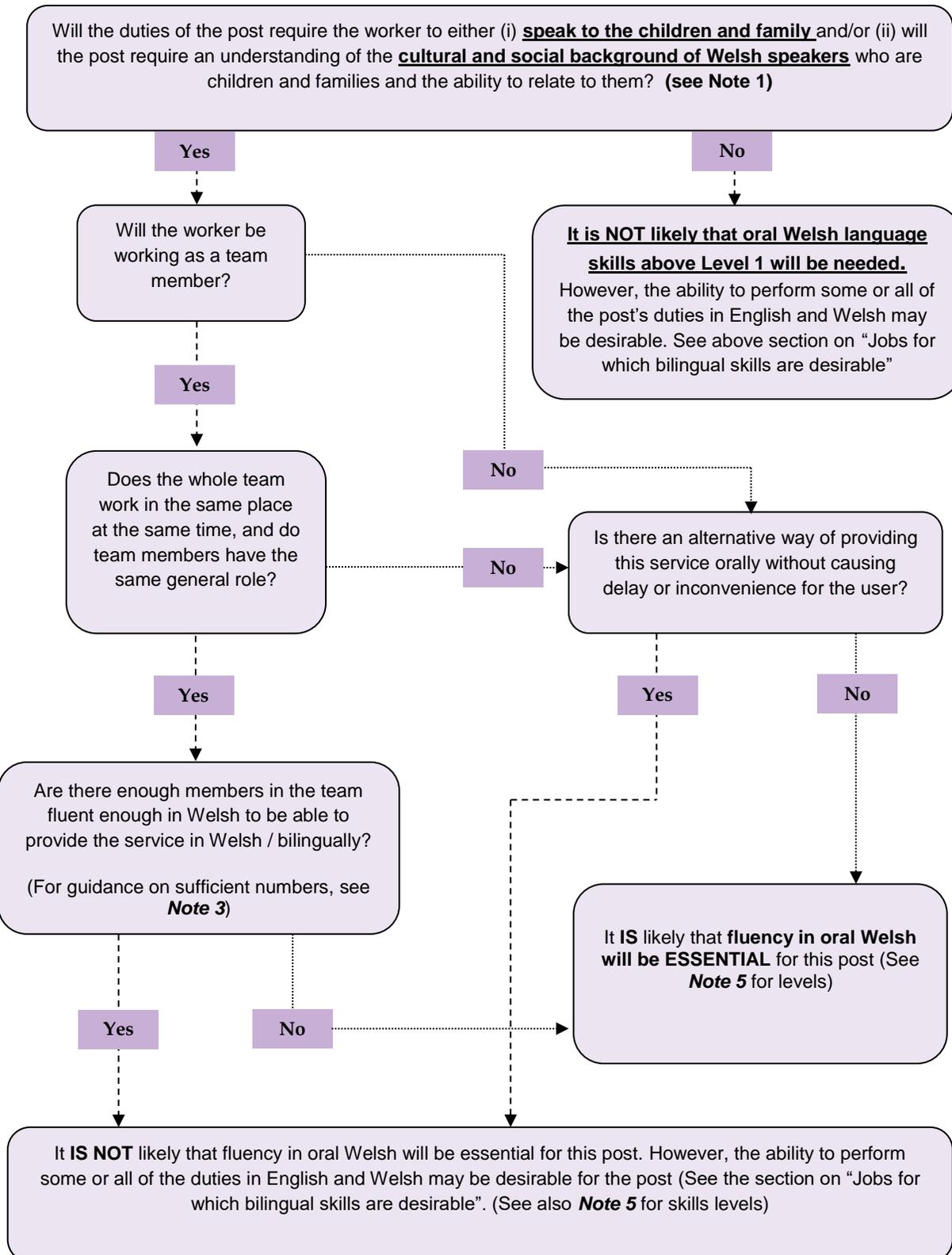
Having followed the chart, turn to the [Language Skills Framework](#) on page 9 to decide which level of skill is required in terms of speaking, understanding, writing or reading Welsh.

Please remember that this is only a guide. These Frameworks and Flowcharts should not be used in a superficial and mechanistic way to decide which skills are required; consideration must be given to the specific circumstances and requirements of each job.

Language Skills Flowchart

ORAL WELSH LANGUAGE SKILLS

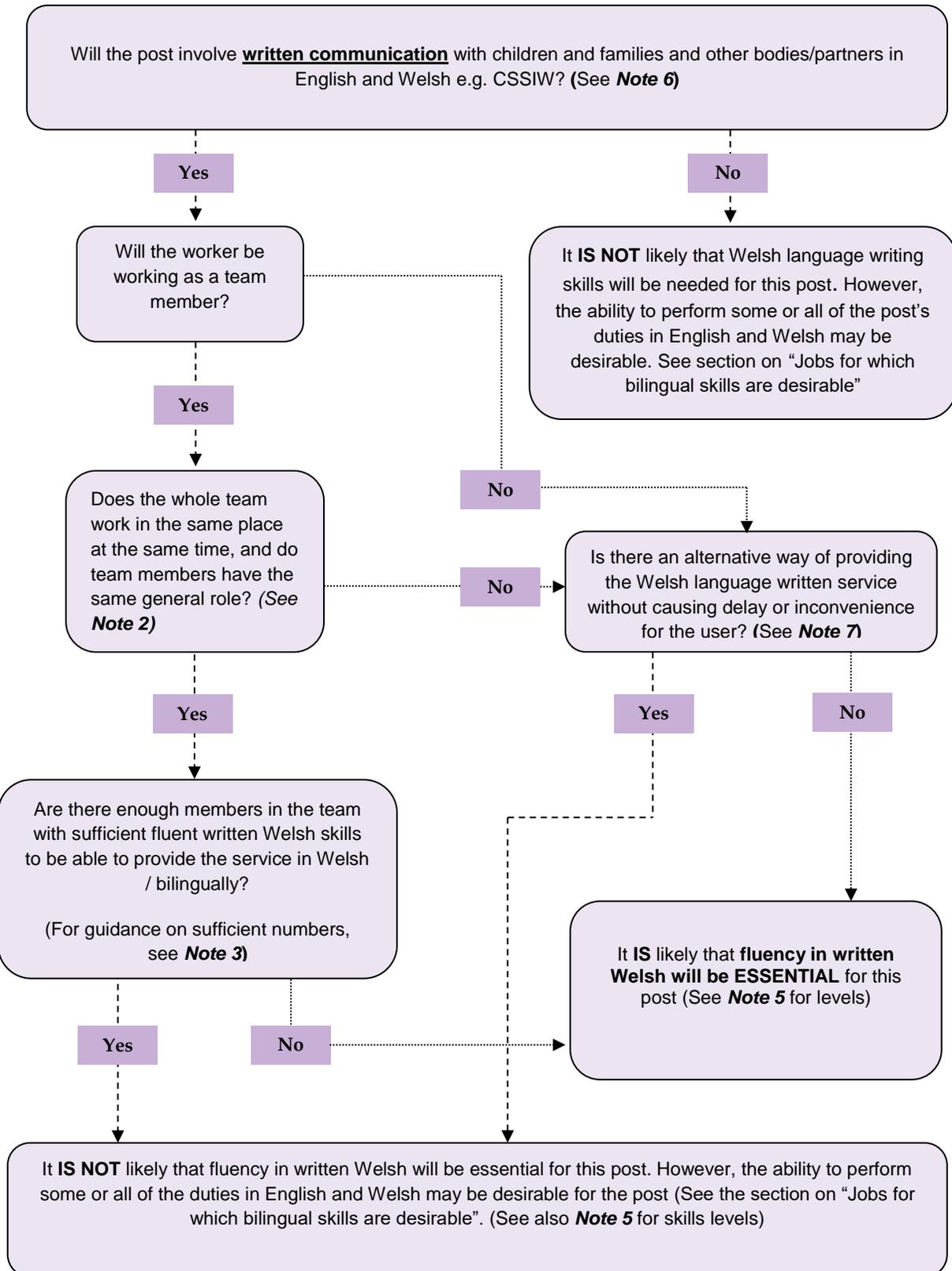
(Additional information is provided in numbered [Notes and references](#) at the end of this document)



Language Skills Flowchart

WELSH LANGUAGE WRITING SKILLS

(Additional information is provided in numbered [Notes and references](#) at the end of this document)



Language Skills Framework³

Level 1			
Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> understand simple personal information details; e.g. where someone lives; his/her name; who the person wishes to see • <i>Can</i> understand information about basic personal needs; e.g. food, drink, toilet and clothing needs • <i>Can</i> understand toddlers' early vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> pronounce place names and personal names correctly • <i>Can</i> greet individuals face to face or over the phone • <i>Can</i> open and close a conversation • <i>Can</i> sing a song or nursery rhyme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> read short sentences, e.g. basic signs, simple instructions, nursery rhymes, simple information on forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> open and close an e-mail or letter • <i>Can</i> write personal names, place names, job titles • <i>Can</i> write a simple message to a colleague on paper or e-mail, e.g. such and such has called • <i>Can</i> write simple words e.g. ci/dog, cath/cat
<p>General Description of Level 1:</p> <p>Can understand basic everyday phrases if the person speaks slowly and clearly and is willing to help. Can introduce yourself and others and can ask and answer questions regarding basic information, e.g. where someone lives; what they like doing. Can pass on a simple message or make a straightforward request, e.g. via e-mail.</p>			

³ With reference to the WJEC Framework and The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) levels

Level 2			
Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> understand when people speak slowly about everyday situations, e.g. providing person information, talking about what they have been doing, what they would like to do, how they feel in general • <i>Can</i> understand when people ask you to do something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> communicate simple information or ask common questions, e.g. to acquire information from an individual, parent or carer or to ensure the safety of an individual • <i>Can</i> use welsh to get to, and empathise with, the individual, but not able to conduct the entire conversation or session in Welsh • <i>Can</i> hold a short conversation with an individual when providing care or exchanging relatively straightforward information • <i>Can</i> contribute to a meeting, but need to revert to English for specialist terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> read short messages and certain letters or e-mails, e.g. those which make a request or ask you to pass on a message • <i>Can</i> read a simple story aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> write a short message to a colleague asking a question; thanking her/him, explaining something e.g. time and place of a meeting • <i>Can</i> write a short letter or e-mail to arrange an appointment
<p>General Description of Level 2:</p> <p>Can understand sentences when people talk about everyday situations, e.g. simple personal and family information. Can hold a basic conversation with someone to obtain or exchange straightforward information, e.g. discuss how a child is settling in or something which has happened that day. Can write and understand messages in letters or e-mails describing familiar issues and written in short sentences.</p>			

Level 3			
Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> understand individuals and colleagues when exchanging information or discussing plans, if the subject is familiar • <i>Can</i> understand a discussion at a meeting if the subject is familiar • <i>Can</i> understand children and their families, carers and colleagues in a familiar situation or in everyday conversation assessing risk in work with vulnerable children and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> take part in most conversations with colleagues about work and plans if the vocabulary is not too technical • <i>Can</i> hold a conversation with an individual when providing care or exchanging relatively straightforward information • <i>Can</i> contribute to a meeting, but need to revert to English for specialist terms fully and in detail, even when discussing complex issues • <i>Can</i> adapt the style and register of your language to suit the audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> understand most e-mail messages or letters concerning day to day work • <i>Can</i> guess the meaning of a word based on context if the subject is familiar • <i>Can</i> read a simple, straightforward article in a newspaper or magazine types of written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> write a letter or e-mail to an individual about most topics in order to request something; provide an explanation; describe an experience or situation; invite people or organise an event • <i>Can</i> write relatively accurately when drafting a short information leaflet or informal Welsh as required • <i>Can</i> write a range of documents accurately and with confidence
<p>General Description of Level 3:</p> <p>Can understand the main points when an individual or colleague is talking about familiar subjects, e.g. during a conversation or small group meeting. Can hold extended conversations with fluent speakers about familiar subjects involving everyday work. Can describe experiences and events and provide concise explanations and reasons for opinions and plans. Can read articles, letters or e-mails about general subjects. Can write letters or e-mails about most subjects, e.g. requesting something; providing information; inviting somebody or organising an event.</p>			

Level 4			
Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> follow most conversations and discussions with user's carers and colleagues even if the subject matter is unfamiliar • <i>Can</i> understand differences in register and dialect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> contribute effectively to internal and external meetings in a work context • <i>Can</i> converse comfortably with individuals and exchange information as required during assessments, planning etc • <i>Can</i> argue for and against a specific case • <i>Can</i> chair meetings and answer questions from the chair confidently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> read most correspondence and scan long texts to find details • <i>Can</i> understand most newspaper articles and reports with the aid of a dictionary • <i>Can</i> understand novels and other texts, unless written in a very formal or colloquial form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> write well-structured reports or other texts in a register suited to the reader • <i>Can</i> produce correspondence of all types, short reports, documents and literature with the support of an editor or electronic aid
<p>General Description of Level 4:</p> <p>Can usually follow most conversations or discussions, even on unfamiliar topics, unless the speaker has a strong or unfamiliar accent. Can talk confidently with fluent speakers about familiar subjects relating to work, and can express an opinion, take part in discussion, and talk extensively about general topics, e.g. in meetings or one-to-one situations with individuals or carers. Can understand most correspondence, newspaper articles and reports intended for fluent speakers with the aid of a dictionary and can scan long texts to find details. Can complete forms and write reports relating to work and respond accurately to most correspondence.</p>			

Level 5			
Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> follow all conversations and discussions with individuals, carers and colleagues • <i>Can</i> understand the ambiguity and nuance of language when assessing risk in work with vulnerable children and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> discuss complex and in-depth issues with individuals and carers and carry out a detailed assessment of needs etc • <i>Can</i> express yourself fully and in detail, even when discussing complex issues • <i>Can</i> adapt the style and register of your language to suit the audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> read and understand almost all written texts without difficulty, referring to a dictionary occasionally • <i>Can</i> read long texts to find relevant details and can understand most types of written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can</i> write reports, assessments and records in a clear style appropriate to the reader with the support of electronic language aids • <i>Can</i> write formal or informal Welsh as required • <i>Can</i> write a range of documents accurately and with confidence
<p>General Description of Level 5:</p> <p>Can easily understand everything that is being said, including carrying out assessments or undertaking detailed and intensive work with children and their families or carers. Can talk extensively about complex issues, presenting difficult information or information of an emotional nature; can facilitate and summarise extended or complex discussions. Can summarise information from different sources (orally and in writing) and present it in a cohesive way. Can express themselves spontaneously, fluently and in detail, adapting the language register to suit the audience.</p>			

Section 4

Recruiting Welsh speakers to specific roles

If Welsh is desirable or essential for a post, remember to state this in the recruitment material. You should do so in a friendly way which may attract most Welsh speakers and learners who have reached a good standard of Welsh.

When a post becomes vacant, or when a new post is created, the Provider / Manager (or other) will make arrangements to fill the post. They should identify in the job description the type of skills that are needed, making reference to the Language Skills Framework.

For historical reasons, many Welsh speakers do not feel that their skills are good enough for use at work. Making reference to the Language Skills Framework reduces anxiety and often enables individuals to realise that they already have the exact skills required. You can also note that applications are welcome from those who have learnt Welsh to a good standard.

If no applicants have the precise Welsh language skills required for the post for which Welsh language skills are essential, you could appoint someone with lower level skills, or a good Welsh learner, on the condition that they improve their skills to the standard needed to carry out the post within an agreed timescale. If you do so, this should be included as a condition of employment and addressed in a formal learning contract.

Notes and references

1. “Talking to the individual” includes, for example:

- Talking to the child or family during the delivery of care
- Holding a conversation with the child, family or carer
- Providing an answer-phone service
- Reception duties
- Presenting information at staff team meetings.

You should proactively **offer** language choice in all these situations from the first point of contact. Having identified the language normally used by the child and family, all subsequent interactions should be carried out in their preferred language.

One important consideration is the amount of contact between the practitioner and the child and family. Generally speaking, if the practitioner has contact with children for more than 10% of her/his working time, such contact can be deemed significant and requires the practitioner to operate in the child’s normal language. Ten per cent represents half a day per week of a full-time post.

In all cases, all employees should show basic linguistic courtesy towards individuals and families by offering, and responding to, simple Welsh greetings, and being able to accurately pronounce and record Welsh place names and personal names. This is not simply a matter of courtesy – the ability to understand, record and communicate place names, personal names and addresses and convey and receive simple instructions with accuracy is essential for providing a safe and effective service.

It can be a key factor in ensuring effective communication and establishing good relationships with individuals, as well as ensuring that information is recorded accurately.

The question on the **Language Skills Flowchart** also refers to “an understanding of the cultural and social background of Welsh speakers ... and the ability to relate to them”. The ability to communicate in Welsh with Welsh speakers will be a key aspect. A lack of understanding may lead one to act insensitively or in a culturally inappropriate way.

2. If team members have:

- similar job descriptions, and broadly the same duties
- similar working hours
- a shared workplace/room

They may be considered to have broadly the same role.

3. The key to managing language skills resources on a team basis is to plan ahead with a view to ensuring that the team has sufficient Welsh language capacity for all contact with children and families. When reflecting on the Welsh language skills required for individual jobs and teams, you should try to strike a balance between:

- The staffing situation of the setting and the team’s capacity
- The amount of contact between the post-holder and the child / family

When considering the area’s demographic and linguistic aspect, it is always important to remember:

- That relatively low percentages of Welsh speakers can often disguise the fact that numbers are significant;
- Managers should plan to ensure adequate numbers of staff with the necessary skills are able to **offer** a real language choice, rather than planning on the basis of their own impression of assumed demand. If you actively **offer** choice in an impartial and friendly way, evidence suggests that many Welsh speakers will choose Welsh language services.

4. Turning to another example, you should ensure that you are able to respond in Welsh to all Welsh language telephone calls, without causing any delay or inconvenience to the caller. In order to respond effectively to telephone calls, you should therefore give callers every opportunity to express themselves in their preferred language. If the person answering is in a post which requires fluency in Welsh, or if an arrangement is in place to transfer the call without delay to a bilingual colleague who is able to deal with the enquiry, the answer to this question on the chart might be “Yes”.

5. Once an assessment has been made to determine whether Welsh language skills will be essential or desirable for the post, it will be necessary to decide the exact level of Welsh language skills required in terms of speaking, writing, reading and understanding Welsh. You can do this by referring to the language skills framework in Section 3. The framework offers descriptions of different communication tasks which match different skills levels. For example, if you decide that Welsh language speaking skills are needed for a particular post, look at the framework for the oral tasks appropriate to the post, and the appropriate level of oral Welsh needed.

Levels can vary from the ability to greet and welcome people at reception (minimum of Level 2 or 3), to the ability to hold a detailed conversation or contribute to a care plan meeting (Level 4 or 5). Similarly, if Welsh language writing skills are needed, it will be necessary to decide on the level of writing skills required. This can vary from the ability to write a simple note at reception to the ability to take minutes of sensitive meetings or write reports. The levels framework will help you decide which level of written Welsh language skills is appropriate for any post.

6. You should seek to take advantage of every opportunity to recruit bilingual practitioners who are confident enough to write simple pieces of Welsh. This is far more cost-effective than sending work to external translators. When recruiting, you can offer opportunities for the successful candidate to develop skills and confidence in written Welsh.

7. A written service in Welsh will generally be one of the following:

- Instigated by you as a setting, e.g. correspondence, forms, newsletters or leaflets responding to a message from an individual, another body or the public, or
- A written record of some kind

You should ensure (via recruitment and / or staff training and development) that there is sufficient capacity within the team to at least prepare first drafts of these types of Welsh texts as required. It is often not cost-effective to send work to professional translators – it is more cost-effective for you to ensure that your own team has the capacity to write in Welsh.