



Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner



Holding bilingual video meetings

Annex

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Important note:

A number of organisations are required by statute to comply with the standards regime under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This advice document is not a statutory code of practice under that Measure and should not be referred to in interpreting of the standards. It is a matter for organisations to decide how to comply with Welsh language standards. In doing so, they may refer to this document. But failure to act in accordance with its recommendations will not necessarily mean non-compliance with the standards.

For other organisations, this advice document will support them to provide first-class bilingual services and to operate in a context where the Welsh language has official status in Wales.

1 Background (COVID-19)

This advice note has been prepared to provide quick advice to organisations during the global crisis caused by COVID-19. The note is intended to give practical guidance to organisations on how to continue to offer high quality bilingual services during this unprecedented period. The fundamental changes to people's work patterns and lives as a result of the current restrictions have caused a revolution in the use of technology, especially those technologies that allow people to conduct meetings remotely. It is almost inevitable that these technologies will continue to develop and evolve during this time – as will our experience of using them. Therefore we do not intend for this advice note to be static: we will continue to add to it as new developments emerge and as people and organisations in Wales – and beyond – continue to innovate in order to continue to offer bilingual services.

We want to hear from you about your experiences of holding bilingual video meetings during this time so that we can share good practice and support other organisations and individuals. Please share your comments with us at post@welshlanguagecommissioner.wales.



2 Holding bilingual video meetings

- 2.1 Holding video meetings is a good way of saving on time and travel costs, and sometimes it's the only practical way of holding a meeting when people are scattered far and wide. When holding a video meeting, it's possible that you will need an interpreter present in order to facilitate a bilingual meeting. There is further information about using simultaneous interpretation services in Part 3 of the [Advice document: Bilingual drafting, translation and using Welsh face to face](#) where you will find practical considerations relating to using a professional interpreter, when it's necessary to use more than one interpreter, and how to go about arranging an interpreter's service, for example.
- 2.2 It should be emphasised, however, that video meetings can be more challenging and more stressful for the interpreter than an ordinary meeting. It can be more difficult for the interpreter to understand contributions due to audio or video interruptions, for example. It is therefore important that the interpreter is not expected to translate for long periods without breaks. Discussions should be had with the interpreter in advance as to whether more than one interpreter will be required.

3 System requirements

- 3.1 Although not all videoconferencing systems can fully support bilingual meetings as standard, there are systems available where participants can choose to hear the meeting in its original language or listen to the translation through a different channel. You should check what your system offers or discuss your needs with your provider.
- 3.2 If your provider doesn't offer a system that facilitates interpretation, it may be possible for you to invest or develop an add-on solution for your current system. Discuss with your IT specialists and refer to the case study by ADRA (formerly Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd) in [Part 3 of the advice document](#) (p. 52) for an example of how to go about adding an element to your videoconferencing system that facilitates interpretation.
- 3.3 It may also be possible for you to use an additional, separate system to your existing videoconferencing system where the interpreter contacts the main meeting and then provides the translation through a phone line or other device. It must be emphasised that this solution would not be suitable if a large number of people needed a translation, however, and that there are obvious limitations as it requires participants in the meeting to have access to more than one device.
- 3.4 If you are unable to find a satisfactory solution internally, remember that you may also discuss your needs with an external language service provider. Translation companies in Wales are gaining experience in this area very quickly and some may even provide a meeting service for you, using appropriate videoconferencing software.



4 Security

- 4.1 The Information Commissioner has published a [blog](#) about general issues to bear in mind when conducting meetings via videoconferencing software. Depending on which solution you prefer, there may be additional security considerations. Therefore, make sure you check your provider's security guidelines and discuss your needs with your IT specialists or external providers to ensure that relevant and appropriate security measures are in place.
- 4.2 You can find more data protection considerations on the Information Commissioner's website, and there may be additional considerations if you are using an external interpreter.

5 Arranging a meeting

5.1 Holding bilingual meetings via videoconferencing is a relatively new experience for people. It is therefore important that you prepare thoroughly in advance, and also take responsibility for preparing and briefing those who will take part in the meeting, including chairs, interpreters and technicians. You will need to consider in advance the technological challenges that may arise during the meeting and how you will deal with them. Also remember to:

- consider the length of the meeting: video meetings can be tiring and you will need to consider carefully whether you require more than one interpreter to be present; if so, you will need to discuss how the interpreters will communicate with each other
- check that the interpreter has experience of providing services in a video meeting, if not you should certainly arrange to test the technology beforehand
- ensure that you brief the interpreter thoroughly beforehand and provide a copy of the meeting papers well in advance
- ensure that the papers (including any slides or documents that will be shared on the screen during a meeting) are all prepared bilingually
- consider in advance whether you wish to record the meeting and discuss this with the interpreter
- note when inviting participants that the meeting will be bilingual with an interpreter present
- give clear instructions, in Welsh and English, about how to join the meeting, especially if this is the first time participants are using the system
- give clear instructions beforehand about how to receive the interpretation
- ask participants to join the meeting promptly, or a few minutes before the meeting starts, so that the meeting settings can be arranged and the interpreter appointed before discussions begin
- ensure that the chair understands that they will be facilitating a bilingual meeting and understands the requirements of the interpreter and the basics of the technology
- ensure that the interpreter has a good microphone and headphone set
- note if participants will need to use special earphones
- note if participants will need to use a specific app or browser.

5.2 If you're likely to be using a chat function, often found on the side of the screen, during a video meeting, remember to appoint one of the participants to keep an eye on these messages, or invite a translator to do so. These messages will also need to be translated. Please note that it would not be reasonable to expect the interpreter to provide this text translation service as well.

5.3 If one or more of the participants are deaf or hard of hearing, make sure that the individuals have the appropriate equipment to hear the meeting in their language of choice. Some video systems also allow subtitles where it's possible to appoint a meeting attendee to transcribe or invite a third party to do the transcription.



6 Holding a meeting



6.1 Before starting the meeting, remember to:

- explain to participants how to open and close their microphones and cameras by using the system
- encourage people to connect to the meeting using video as well as audio as this will help the interpreter to know who is speaking and to lip read if the connection is of high enough quality
- ensure that all participants are on the right channel; it's likely that there will be one channel for those who wish to listen to the meeting in its original language, and another channel streaming the interpretation
- introduce the interpreter and test that the interpretation system is working
- remind participants that they can contribute in Welsh or English during the meeting and also type messages through the chat function in both Welsh and English
- remind participants to speak clearly and slowly as it's possible that there will be some disruption to the connection and that the interpreter won't be able to see a speaker's face clear enough to lip read
- ask participants to mute their microphones when they're not contributing, this will improve the sound quality for everyone; some systems allow the meeting's host to open and mute other participants' microphones
- ask participants to wait a second or two after opening their microphones before speaking so that the interpreter can hear everything as there can be a delay on the audio.

7 If technical problems arise



7.1 You should be clear from the beginning who is responsible for making the technology work smoothly. It may be useful to specify in advance that an additional officer is available to oversee technical issues and respond to any queries. You can provide a specific phone number for people to contact or instructions on how to send written messages. Also ensure that the interpreter has had the opportunity to discuss with the IT officers or technicians in advance and knows how to contact them directly during the meeting.

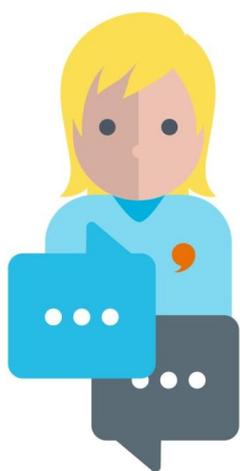
7.2 It can be useful to have a system in place to allow participants to note if there is a problem with the interpreting; this can be as simple as raising a hand or typing a message through the chat function.

7.3 It is essential that the interpreter can concentrate fully on the interpreting. It would not be reasonable to expect an interpreter to be responsible for the administrative or technological arrangements of the meeting at the same time.

7.4 For more suggestions about how to hold a successful bilingual meeting, refer to the general guidance for chairs and guidance for the attendees of bilingual meetings in [Part 3 of the advice document](#) (pp. 50–1).

8 Case study on holding bilingual video meetings: Senedd Cymru

- 8.1 Senedd Cymru (formerly the National Assembly for Wales) is the first legislature in the UK – and amongst the first in the world – to hold a Plenary Session through the medium of videoconferencing software. In addition, the Plenary is conducted bilingually. Before deciding to go ahead with a virtual meeting it had to be ensured that interpretation could be provided ‘remotely’ as the Government of Wales Acts, the Official Languages Act and the Official Languages Scheme not to mention the Standing Orders all require for all parliamentary public procedures to be available bilingually by default. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis meant that the Senedd had to adapt and innovate in its working methods overnight.
- 8.2 The Senedd has been holding bilingual meetings using a 'business account' on Zoom software. This is one of the most sophisticated accounts currently offered by Zoom and the Senedd has proved that this gives the ICT team more control and also allows for additional security measures.
- 8.3 In the Senedd's experience, the most important things to remember when using this system to hold bilingual meetings are:
- ensuring that 'Language Interpretation' is enabled in the settings before sending the invitation to the meeting
 - ensuring that everyone is connected to the right channels ('Off' for those who want to hear the meeting in the original language only and 'English', if this is the chosen language for the translation channel, for those wishing to receive the translation)
 - not to appoint the interpreter on the system until everyone has joined the meeting; if people join after the interpreter is appointed, it can cause both audio channels to stream over each other through the 'English' channel.
- 8.4 Further instructions can be found on the [Zoom website](#).



“I’m going to draw to a close now this quite extraordinary meeting of our Senedd and thank all Members and Ministers for taking part [...] Democratic accountability is important, and continues to be important even in these most trying of times. Therefore, I want to thank everybody who’s taken part today in making sure that democracy is alive and well in Wales, and we will look to repeat this for as long as we need to do so.”

Elin Jones, The Llywydd of the Senedd
(in closing the Senedd’s First virtual Plenary on 1 April 2020)

9 Sharing good practice

- 9.1 Another organisation that has benefited from using Zoom software to ensure that they can continue to comply with Welsh language standards by offering language choice at meetings is National Museum Wales. National Museum Wales officials have produced detailed practical guidance to support their officers in accessing the services of an interpreter using Zoom. These guidelines guide potential users step by step through the technical process of joining a meeting. They recognise many different users – from chair to interpreter – and offer them specific tailored instructions. The guidelines were initially designed for internal use but National Museum Wales has helped potential users from other organisations by publicly sharing the guidelines to support others who wish to facilitate bilingual meetings or events. You can view the guidelines on [National Museum Wales' website](#).

“We are pleased to be able to use technology to continue to hold bilingual meetings at a difficult time, and hope that the guidelines will be of use to others. Although we pursued this work due to the Coronavirus crisis, it will also be useful when we return to our offices, to facilitate greener bilingual meetings and reduce the need to travel.”

**Manon Humphreys, Welsh Language Coordinator,
National Museum Wales**

