

General Optical Council's Annual Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner 2024-25

Introduction

This year marks our second year of operating under the revised Welsh Language Standards (WLS). The Standards have become part of our everyday work as a regulator. We see them not only as a statutory duty, but also as part of our wider commitment to fairness, inclusion and treating people with respect.

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

Our approach has been practical and people-focused: embedding the Standards into daily processes, supporting colleagues to understand their responsibilities, and ensuring that Welsh speakers, whether registrants, patients or members of the public, can access our services without disadvantage.

The progress we've made is thanks to the commitment of our teams, the guidance of the Welsh Language Standards Joint Regulators Forum, and feedback from stakeholders such as Optometry Wales. We recognise that promoting the Welsh language is ongoing work, and we will continue to look for ways to improve access and visibility year on year.

Background

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

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

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

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

Since the compliance deadline in December 2023, we have continued to build on the programme of work that got us ready for the Welsh Language Standards. The foundations we put in place are now part of our everyday practice, from translating documents and running bilingual consultations to ensuring our website, phone system, and hearings can all be accessed in Welsh. We don't just aim to meet the requirements of the Standards; where it is proportionate and practical, we look for opportunities to go further and make services more accessible.

Responsibility for day-to-day compliance sits with our EDI Manager, reflecting the fact that Welsh language is both a regulatory and an inclusion priority. We are proud that our Council has representatives from all the UK nations, including Wales, and our current representative, Lisa Gerson, maintains oversight.

Our approach 2024-25

We have taken a proactive and inclusive approach to embedding the WLS. This has included:

- Sharing information about the Welsh Language Standards in all new starter inductions so colleagues understand their responsibilities from the outset.
- Continuing to provide training for all staff on the history and culture of the Welsh language, and our responsibilities under the WLS.
- Making the Welsh language a standing feature of our Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) template, so that policy decisions cannot be signed off without considering impacts on the Welsh language.
- Publishing Welsh versions of our key corporate documents, including the Annual Report and Accounts and our EDI Annual Report.
- Maintaining our intranet hub with practical guidance and resources for staff.
- Working closely with the Joint Regulators Forum to share practice, test our understanding, and take a consistent approach across the sector.

Service Delivery Standards

We have continued to strengthen the ways people can use our services in Welsh:

- Our automated phone system and website remain available in Welsh.
- Over the year, 17 additional documents have been translated, and all relevant new or revised documents are now published simultaneously in Welsh and English.
- We are ready to conduct meetings and hearings in Welsh if requested. We have standing arrangements with interpretation providers and trained staff in place, though no requests were received this year.
- We continue to publish certain documents in Welsh even where this is not strictly required, where it supports accessibility and good practice.
- In October 2024, a digital translation solution (Weglot) was integrated into the existing MyGOC platform, enabling users to access the system in both English and Welsh. This fulfilled the final requirements of the compliance

notice issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner ahead of the specified deadline.

At the GOC, we want people to have real choice in how they use our services, whether that's in Welsh or English. That means you can read important documents like the Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians in Welsh, take part in consultations bilingually, and access selected reports in Welsh. Translation and interpretation support is also available if you'd like to contact us in Welsh.

[Welsh-language services page](#).

Operational standards

Our operational standards focus on embedding the Welsh language into the way we work as an organisation. This means supporting colleagues to develop skills, monitoring language use across our workforce, and ensuring that Welsh language requirements are considered in recruitment.

- We continue to offer staff opportunities to learn Welsh.
- Our annual EDI monitoring form now includes language use, helping us build a clearer picture of Welsh language skills across our workforce.
- All new posts are screened for Welsh language requirements. None required Welsh as essential in 2024–25, but the process is now embedded.

Compliance and Complaints

We have not received any complaints regarding the Welsh Language Standards in 2024–25. While this suggests our processes are working well, we continue to provide clear routes for complaints in Welsh so that anyone who wishes to raise a concern can do so confidently.

Looking ahead

Our focus for 2025–26 will be to:

- Development is currently underway on a new MyGOC platform, which will also include the same digital translation capability as the current platform.
- Continue to expand the range of materials published in Welsh, particularly those aimed at registrants and the public in Wales.
- Work with partners and colleagues across the sector to build confidence in using the Welsh language as a normal part of professional life. Alongside completing the Welsh-language functionality within MyGOC, we will also explore opportunities for more proactive engagement with Welsh-speaking stakeholders, including testing feedback on our Welsh web pages and documents.

Conclusion

We are proud of the progress we've made in our second year of compliance with the WLS. The Welsh language is part of the identity and culture of Wales, and our role as a UK-wide regulator is to ensure it is treated with the respect and equality it deserves. We see the WLS not only as a legal duty but as an opportunity to strengthen trust, promote inclusion, and support the communities we serve.