

Draft Welsh Language Standards for the health sector laid

These regulations will apply to Local Health Boards, National Health Service Trusts in Wales, Community Health Councils, and the Board of Community Health Councils in Wales, who will have to proactively offer services through the medium of Welsh.

The standards will require health boards to plan their work to improve their offer including more clinical services through the medium of Welsh. They will build on the foundations laid by Mwy na Geiriau..., the Welsh Government's strategic framework for Welsh language services in health, social services and social care which has helped to improve Welsh language services in the sector.

The Minister said:

"It is really important that we increase the responsibility on health boards to provide more services through the medium of Welsh in future. This is particularly important when it comes to elderly patients and very young children who find it more comfortable to communicate in their mother tongue at a time of acute stress.

"We do however have to balance this against the fact that some of the bodies in this sector operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year offering a range of services from routine treatments to open heart surgery, accident and emergency treatment and end-of-life care.

"Mainstreaming Welsh language services into this sector is a huge challenge which will take time. I am confident that the pragmatic approach we have taken in these draft regulations acknowledges these difficulties whilst still moving the process of securing more opportunities for Welsh speakers to engage with the health sector in Welsh going forward."

In addition to making sure that GP surgeries run by health boards will have to comply with the new standards, discussions will also start with contractor representative bodies to agree Welsh language obligations through their contractual arrangements/terms of service.

The Minister laid the regulations following a visit to Cardiff University's medical school, where she saw a lecture being delivered to 300 students through the medium of Welsh, with simultaneous translation for non Welsh speakers and met first language Welsh speaking students who are studying through their mother tongue.

She said:

“My visit to Cardiff’s medical school was an inspiration. While many of the students were not Welsh speakers, having a lecture delivered through the medium of Welsh demonstrated to them that Welsh is a living language that is part of every day life in Wales and is relevant in all situations. I hope for those who are Welsh speakers it provided them with the confidence to use their Welsh in their future careers.

“If the health sector is to fulfil its obligations under the Welsh language standards encouraging Welsh speakers to use their Welsh in their careers and others to learn Welsh will be vitally important. Initiatives such as the ‘Welsh Language Scholarship and Education Network’ at Cardiff University and the work of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the National Centre for Learning Welsh provide opportunities to empower students and staff to use their Welsh in a clinical environment as part of the NHS’ current and future workforce.”