The Welsh language and volunteering
Volunteering is at the heart of the third sector and volunteers’ contributions enable organizations to provide essential, cultural and creative services to individuals throughout Wales. Ensuring that the Welsh language is promoted within the field of volunteering is a crucial aspect of my work as Welsh Language Commissioner.

To ensure that policy makers, funders and service providers understand how to develop Welsh language provision within the field of volunteering, it is important that we analyse the research, collect evidence and set out clear recommendations. Only then can we move forward constructively. I encourage all who have a role to play in the field of volunteering in Wales to take notice of the recommendations in this report.

Meri Huws
Welsh Language Commissioner

Third sector team

The Commissioner’s third sector team focuses on increasing the use of Welsh in the third sector at both policy and grassroots level. We work with organizations to ensure that Welsh language services are available and visible to the public in Wales. We see the availability of opportunities to volunteer through the medium of Welsh as essential to realise our vision.
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Research on volunteering

The research was conducted on behalf of the Welsh Language Commissioner by:

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The purpose was to identify the challenges and opportunities facing volunteering through the medium of Welsh in Wales. What follows is a summary of findings and recommendations derived from the research.

Methodology

30 semi-structured interviews were held with:
- Volunteering facilitators: county bureaus, volunteer coordinators within sports; volunteer coordinators on a national level
- Third sector organizations: local and national organizations using volunteers
- Volunteers: Welsh speakers from a range of ages, in locations across Wales.
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The availability of Welsh language volunteering opportunities

The research found that more comprehensive bilingual provision tends to be offered within traditionally Welsh speaking communities. Moreover, Welsh medium voluntary activities were also to be found within urban contexts, particularly in south east Wales, and 16.6% of individuals stated that Welsh was their language of choice when volunteering with GwirVol.

However, a strong presence of Welsh speakers in a particular area does not always mean that there are plenty of Welsh speaking volunteers within third sector organizations in the area.

Whilst there was not always consistent bilingual provision across Wales, positive attitudes regarding the importance of language sensitivity were held by all of organizations interviewed. Many organizations recognised the particular importance of being sensitive to the language needs of vulnerable individuals and the necessity of having volunteers who could offer services in the user’s language of choice.

“We’re here to act on behalf of every older person in Wales, and [...] many older people possibly from a certain generation are happier maybe, and prefer to speak Welsh, they’re more comfortable speaking Welsh.” (Organization)

That said, the research noted that volunteers are not always made aware of service users’ language choice. This suggests that opportunities to satisfy the needs of Welsh speaking service users have hitherto been missed.

Recommendations

**Welsh Government** to ensure that the Third Sector Partnership Council’s volunteering discussion group considers Welsh language issues as well as this report’s findings.

**Third sector organizations** should analyse any gaps in their bilingual provision in order to identify future volunteering opportunities.

**Third sector organizations** and **volunteering facilitators** to tailor marketing and volunteer recruitment campaigns to ensure they appeal to Welsh people specifically rather than using only UK-wide campaigns.

**Welsh Language Commissioner, WCVA** and **CVCs** to campaign to increase the profile of volunteering through the medium of Welsh, for example through a volunteering award.

**Third sector organizations** to conduct an audit of current volunteers’ linguistic skills and consider service users’ language choice and needs when paring volunteers with opportunities.
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Pathways to volunteering

A tendency for Welsh speaking volunteers to volunteer through informal networks, such as through following family traditions, friends or with the chapel, was observed.

“brothers and sisters follow each other ... it’s difficult to say why you go and join (the organization) ... it’s a tradition that exists in rural areas” (Organization)

Some of the volunteers noted that using formal networks, such as volunteer bureaus, was a useful way of finding opportunities to volunteer when an individual does not already have connections with a particular charity.

The majority of volunteering facilitators questioned saw their role primarily as responding to requests from individuals and organizations. This meant that that they were not reaching out to new audiences, such as Welsh speakers. It was also noted that not all organizations had specific strategies to target Welsh speakers to volunteer, despite seeing the value in doing so.

On the other hand, some volunteering facilitators were proactive in targeting Welsh speakers, using social media; through presence in events such as the Eisteddfod; and advertised in ‘papurau bro’ (local Welsh language, community newspapers).

Others recognised the success of the partnership between the education system and volunteer facilitators, such as the Welsh Baccalaureate and The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, as a means of introducing young people to volunteering.

“the school offered Sports Leadership, and I did it, and then someone from (a volunteering advocacy organizations) came in to offer the Sports Leadership course, and as part of the course we had to volunteer and that's how I heard about it.” (Volunteer)

Recommendations

**Welsh Government** to consider the findings of this research whilst developing a new volunteering strategy.

**Volunteering facilitators** and **third sector organizations** to work in partnership with agencies such as Mentrau Iaith (Welsh language initiatives) and the Urdd.

**Third sector organizations** to take advantage of the partnership between the Welsh medium education sector and volunteer facilitators to recruit volunteers.

**Volunteering facilitators** to take a creative and proactive approach to match volunteers with organizations, such as using bilingual social media and presence at events.
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**Linguistic image**
Fewer bilingual volunteers were to be found with British organizations and organizations with a British ethos. Some of these organizations suggested that their difficulties in attracting Welsh speaking volunteers stemmed from their image.

“I think to some extent in some areas we’re not seen as a Welsh organization so that might have an impact on Welsh speakers coming forward to work for us” (Organization)

In addition to the challenge of presenting a bilingual corporate image, it was reported that producing volunteering opportunity adverts on websites and uploading bilingual opportunities onto www.volunteering-wales.net was a challenge for some. This means that some volunteering opportunities suitable for Welsh speakers are therefore advertised in English only. With regards this challenge, interviewees noted that translation costs and lack of written Welsh language skills within organizations were the greatest barriers.

**Recommendations**

**Third sector organizations** wishing to attract Welsh speaking volunteers need to consider the way in which they market themselves to the public in Wales through using bilingual branding and local campaigns to target Welsh speakers in their communities.

**Volunteering facilitators** to advertise opportunities in both languages as Welsh speakers are more likely to see organizations with a bilingual image as relevant to them.

“Well for me if I see somewhere which doesn’t advertise in both languages I don’t feel that it’s right for me anyway” (Volunteer)

**Welsh Language Commissioner** and **WCVA** to investigate ways of providing translation support for organizations to create adverts and to upload bilingual adverts to www.volunteering-wales.net.

**Volunteering facilitators** and **third sector organizations** to use informal Welsh on social media websites – an opportunity for new Welsh speakers and learners to practise their skills.

**Volunteering facilitators** and **third sector organizations** to draw on the experiences of current Welsh speaking volunteers at volunteering fairs through using video clips and articles in order to encourage others.

“There’s a volunteering fair in [local town], we’ll be going there with leaflets and bringing one of the volunteers with me to speak about the experiences they’ve had.” (Organization)

**Welsh Government** to consider how volunteering facilitators and infrastructure organizations can implement this report’s recommendations when developing the code
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**Welsh as a skill**

It appears that there is little awareness that Welsh is a specific skill which is relevant to volunteering. For example, the third sector organizations and volunteering facilitators questioned did not tend to collect comprehensive data about their users’ linguistic skills and neither did they record Welsh language skills when registering volunteers. Collecting such data would be an effective way of paring volunteers with service users.

In addition to the call for Welsh speaking volunteers to deliver face to face services, many of the organizations interviewed reported that there was also a need for volunteers with Welsh writing skills who would be able to prepare bilingual documentation on their behalf.

Despite this need, the number of volunteers interviewed who were confident in their Welsh writing skills was lower than the number who were confident about their Welsh oral skills. It is therefore important to bear in mind that not every Welsh speaking volunteer is confident in preparing bilingual documentation.

That said, many of the sample who were questioned reported that volunteering was an excellent opportunity for new Welsh speakers and learners to practise their skills and gain confidence in speaking the language.

“It’s a lot of help actually, since you get more skills like sociably, you get more of a chat, and it increases your confidence” (Volunteer)

A clear theme that emerged from the young volunteers was the importance of Welsh language skills for employability; there was eagerness to develop practical workplace skills for the future.

**Recommendations**

**Welsh Language Commissioner** to raise the awareness of stakeholders within the sector with regards the Welsh language’s status as a specific skill. Volunteering opportunities can therefore be advertised in the same way as job vacancies, where Welsh language skills are either desirable or essential.

**Third sector organizations** to increase opportunities for new Welsh speakers and learners to use Welsh whilst volunteering.

**Third sector organizations** need to be specific about which skills – oral, listening, writing, reading – are needed to fulfil the responsibilities of volunteering roles.

“some roles, not all roles, ask for Welsh...at the moment we are recruiting for a Welsh speaker to look at digital content and comms where Welsh is essential” (Organization)

**Welsh Language Commissioner, Welsh Government** and **WCVA** to campaign to raise awareness that your Welsh need not be perfect to volunteer, emphasising the use of informal, conversational Welsh.

**Volunteering facilitators** to encourage young Welsh speakers leaving the Welsh language education system that volunteering in Welsh is a way of using the language beyond the classroom and a bridge between school and work.
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What the Commissioner will do?

- Raise awareness of the findings and recommendations through meeting with stakeholders such as Welsh Government, WCVA, County Voluntary Councils, county volunteer bureaus, GwirVol and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Welsh Sports Association.

- Challenge and support stakeholders to implement the recommendations.

- Gain feedback from stakeholders after 12 months to measure the impact of implementing the recommendations of this research.