



Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

EQUALITY & THE WELSH LANGUAGE FACTSHEET

Introduction

The Welsh Language is **not** a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act 2010. The Welsh Language Act 1993 established the principle that the Welsh and English languages should be treated on the basis of equality.

In 2011, the powers of the Welsh Language Board were transferred to the role of Welsh Language Commissioner by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. The Measure gives the Welsh language official status in Wales and provides for a Welsh Language Partnership Council and an Advisory Panel to the Commissioner.

The issues

The percentage of older people who speak Welsh ranges from 15% at age 65 to 19% at age 85 and over. All local authorities apart from Cardiff saw a decrease in the proportion of older people able to speak Welsh. The largest decrease was in Carmarthenshire where the proportion decreased from 59.3% in 2001 to 48.8% in 2011. In Cardiff the proportion remained similar at around 5%.

582,000 (20.8%) people in Wales spoke Welsh in 2011 compared to 562,000 in 2011 (19%). Demographic changes have been suggested as one of reasons for this decrease, including fewer children, more adults and the loss of older speakers. Some Welsh speakers leave Wales and non Welsh speakers move in.

People will use different levels and amounts of Welsh language at different points in their life and for different tasks. The latest census data indicates that whilst people might prefer all their services delivered orally through the medium of Welsh they are sometimes less keen to receive written communications, such as letters or emails, in Welsh.

Language is crucial within assessment and intervention, and interpretation is not always best provided by family members. The choice of language can have an effect upon the formation of clinical and therapeutic relationships and services should be planned effectively.

Staff with some Welsh language skills should be encouraged and supported to improve their Welsh language skills. Service providers have a duty to provide appropriate services based on linguistic choice and not rely on service users to identify the need and create the demand for Welsh medium services.

Respect for dignity means that language needs should be recognised appropriately by service providers.

Conclusions

Older people who speak Welsh – and other languages – need to experience systemic changes in attitudes, procedures and workplace practices. Language related information should accompany people as they go through the system and data should be gathered at first point of contact to establish what language provision is necessary and appropriate.

There is a need for on-going monitoring of Welsh medium services and agencies should provide language awareness training as part of their core training programmes.

To see the evidence base for this factsheet and further resources visit www.olderpeoplewales.com