

July 2019

**Update to the Welsh
Language Commissioner:
2018/2019**

Introduction

The Welsh Language Act 1993 established a duty for public organisations providing services in Wales to produce a Welsh Language Scheme (the Scheme). The Scheme produced by the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) was prepared under the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and in consultation with the Welsh Language Board (now the Welsh Language Commissioner) prior to publication.

It describes how, when providing services to the public in Wales we will give effect to the principle that we treat the English and Welsh languages equally, so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable.

The Scheme was prepared in accordance with Sections 12 to 14 of the Act and in accordance with guidelines issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner under Section 9 of the Act. The Scheme came into effect on 11 May 2011.

This paper sets out how LeO has met its obligations under the terms of its Scheme when delivering its services in Wales from June 2018 to May 2019. This is the eighth year of the Scheme's operation.

What we do

The Legal Ombudsman scheme was set up by the Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) under the Legal Services Act 2007. Users of legal services are able to access an independent and impartial Ombudsman scheme to resolve disputes involving their lawyer. We are the single body for all consumer legal complaints. From January 2015 until April 2019 we also accepted complaints about claims management companies. This jurisdiction has now transferred to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

The OLC is accountable to Parliament through the Lord Chancellor and is an arm's length body of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). LeO also has a direct relationship with the Legal Services Board (LSB) which has various functions overseeing the Office for Legal Complaints.

The relationship between the OLC, the MoJ and the LSB is set out in a tripartite operating protocol agreed between the bodies, which sets the framework for how the relationship will operate with our partner organisations. This is available from our website: <http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk>

Contacts and complaints sent to us for investigation

At the time of writing, LeO has again received only one complaint for investigation from someone who has identified themselves as a Welsh speaker.

We corresponded with two Welsh MPs this year and one Assembly Member. None of these requested that we correspond in Welsh.

Our Welsh 'general information' section on the LeO website has received 231 unique page views over the last year. Unique page views refer to the number of individual users instead of simply number of clicks. The average time spent on this page was 46 seconds.

More recently, we have introduced new or refreshed Welsh translations of the following website pages:

- **Customer Assessment Tool questions page**
[20 unique page views – average time spent on page: 2 min 29 sec]
- **Complaint form page**
[20 unique page views – average time spent on page: 2 min 57 sec]
- **Privacy policy page**
[9 unique page views – average time spent on page: 2 min 03 sec]
- **Signposting page**
[12 unique page views – average time spent on page: 5 min 30 sec]

More information about the new Customer Assessment Tool is given below.

Our response to the Welsh Language Act requirements is proportionate to the level of contacts we receive in the Welsh language. We keep this under regular review and will update our language requirements if anything substantive changes.

New initiatives

Where new corporate policies and initiatives may affect our Scheme, LeO will consult the Welsh Language Commissioner.

When considering any new policy changes, consideration is given to any impact and implications that the policy may have on the Welsh Language Scheme.

We reviewed the outcome of the review of the Welsh Language Standards and were satisfied that the changes did not apply to our organisation and therefore no changes were recommended.

Customer Assessment Tool

One of our major successful projects this year was the launch of a new tool on our website which provides a quick way for consumers to contact the Legal Ombudsman and discover whether their complaint can be handled immediately, or by another organisation or is too early to be dealt with.

The Customer Assessment Tool was developed in-house and is part of our ongoing programme of modernisation work to ensure we provide high levels of service to all our customers. It was launched in English and Welsh on 4 December 2018.

Publications

As part of our business plan commitments for this year, we will be producing a thematic report that looks at the type of complaints we receive from Welsh residents. This will be translated into Welsh and sent to target consumer organisations and legal services stakeholders in Wales. We will also be publishing our Annual Report & Accounts in Welsh for the first time this year. Both of these publications will be made available in Welsh on our website.

Speaking events

One of our ombudsmen spoke at a Legal Network Wales event in October 2018. The success of this has meant that we have been invited back to three further events in the reporting year to come (2019/20).

Monitoring and complaints

We continue to monitor our Welsh language provision in order to ensure its compliance with the requirements of the Scheme.

The External Affairs team has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the Scheme and will continue to monitor our progress in delivering it.

Conclusion

The Legal Ombudsman continues to take its statutory obligations towards Welsh language provision seriously. We will continue to assess how we may best serve the interests of Welsh service users.

For more information on information contained in this paper please contact the External Affairs team at support@legalombudsman.org.uk.