



Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

# **A survey of the use made of the Welsh language on Twitter**

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## 1. Summary

This report outlines the main findings and conclusions of the checking and inspection exercise of the use made of the Welsh Language on Twitter.

The arrangements of 30 bodies were examined, including 22 Local Authorities, three National Park Authorities, the Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Community Housing Cymru and two Social Housing Providers, namely Cartrefi Conwy and Wales and West Housing.

The findings of the exercise show that 13% of organizations maintain bilingual accounts, 40% maintain separate Welsh and English accounts and 47% maintain accounts in English only with a few Welsh messages appearing from time to time.

## 2. Background

The objective of the exercise was to examine the existing practices in organizations regarding maintaining Twitter accounts to establish a clear picture of the current situation and offer guidance and examples of good practice.

The exercise took place in January 2014.

## 3. Methodology

The aim of this exercise was to examine how 30 organizations used Twitter accounts. This only considered the accounts of the organizations noted above.

It was a desk exercise and none of the above organizations were contacted directly. A personal Twitter account was opened to follow the corporate accounts of each of the organizations noted above and any other accounts belonging to these organizations that we came across. The organizations' websites were also used to obtain further information such as how many Twitter accounts they had and, specifically, the various departments within those organizations.

The aim was to record the following information about each organization:

- Language of the corporate account
- Number of accounts
- Number of Welsh accounts

- Number of English accounts
- Number of followers
- Number of Welsh followers
- Number of English followers
- Language used to respond to comments
- Use of the accounts
- Were the Welsh and English accounts similar?
- Were the bilingual accounts fully bilingual?

Due to the nature of Twitter, the number of times an organization used its accounts was not recorded, for example on a daily basis etc but information was collected regarding the number of times organizations maintaining separate Welsh and English accounts had tweeted since setting up their profiles.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Corporate Accounts

Each of the organizations in question had at least one account. Of those, 4 (13%) were bilingual, i.e. Welsh and English appearing on the same account. 12 (40%) were Welsh and English, i.e. individual Welsh and English accounts, and 14 (47%) were English only accounts. However it should be noted that some Welsh comments did occasionally appear on some accounts, but not in sufficient numbers to be considered a bilingual service.

#### Local Authorities

- 10 (45%) English only account
- 2 (10%) bilingual account
- 10 (45%) separate Welsh and English accounts

#### National Parks

- 1 separate Welsh and English account
- 1 bilingual account
- 1 English only account

The following gives an indication of the practices of six organizations and the number of accounts and followers it was possible to obtain information about. Those noted are followers of the corporate accounts only. More detailed results are included in Appendix 1. Please note

that the column "Language used to respond to comments" has been completed in all cases as "Language of enquiry" - but it should be noted that evidence of enquiries in Welsh was not present in every case.

### 4.2 Case Studies

The figures below were correct on January 2014. The following accounts were identified, but it is possible that the organization administers other accounts as well.

#### Monmouthshire County Council

- 15 English only accounts
- 8837 followers

#### Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

- 6 English only accounts
- 4048 followers

#### Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

- 24 English only accounts
- 5544 followers

#### Wrexham County Borough Council

- 13 accounts (3 Welsh and 10 English)
- 185 Welsh followers
- 7943 English followers

#### Swansea City Council

- 32 accounts (4 Welsh and 28 English)
- 114 Welsh followers
- 15100 English followers

#### Newport City Council

- 5 English only accounts
- 5000 followers

#### Welsh Government

- Separate Welsh and English Corporate Accounts
- 2442 Welsh followers
- 28200 English followers

### 4.3 Separate Welsh and English accounts

As noted above, 12 organizations maintain separate Welsh and English accounts. The percentage and number of times those organizations have tweeted on their Welsh and English accounts since setting them up is noted in Appendix 2. Without further research it cannot be guaranteed that all tweets on the Welsh accounts were in Welsh. Please see Other Surveys at 4.5 and compare Wrexham Council numbers for example. These figures were correct on 31 January 2014.

There could be a number of reasons why a great deal more tweeting took place in English than in Welsh.

- Welsh and English account commencement dates do not correspond;
  - A greater number of the public tweet with the organization in English, therefore the organization responds in the language of the enquiry;
  - The organization retweeting a message originally tweeted by another organization and which was not available in Welsh, e.g. Arriva Trains, Met Office warning;
- and
- A failure on the part of the organization to tweet in Welsh on occasions.

Included at Appendix 3 is a sample of a day's tweeting by the organizations which provide separate Welsh and English accounts, including the number of Welsh Tweets, the number of English Tweets and the number of corresponding Tweets in both languages. It should be noted that the dates were chosen at random and the only consideration was that the organization had tweeted more than 5 times, excluding Snowdonia National Park, as only two tweets were identified on one day. It should also be noted that the number of retweets or responses to enquiries from the public that took place have been taken into account in the %, e.g. Conwy Council:

Conwy Council	31 January 2014	11 Welsh tweets	22 English tweets	100%
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There are 11 more tweets in English than in Welsh. The 11 tweets in question are English retweets from other organizations or responses to English only enquiries from members of the public. The 11 tweets in Welsh correspond to the 11 tweets in English which should be translated, giving 100% compliance.

## 4.4 Use of accounts

The use of Twitter accounts could be described as an additional notice-board to that which is already available, such as websites and Facebook accounts. Examples of use are general news, events, changes to bin collections, retweeted news and events from other organizations, enquiries from members of the public and bad weather warnings or roadwork warnings.

The use of enquiries from the public was not as great as had been assumed, therefore there was no concrete evidence of instantaneous use which could cause problems with translation. There were examples of conversations with the public and the custom was to respond to enquiries in the original language of the comment.

## 4.5 Other surveys

Kevin Scannell, Professor of Mathematics and Physics at the University of St Louis, Missouri, has undertaken a mapping exercise in respect of tweeters in all Celtic languages and beyond. He has developed a website [indigenoustweets.com](http://indigenoustweets.com) which includes a table of the top 500 users who tweet in Welsh. 8 of the organizations which are part of the Commissioner's Survey appear in the top 500. The information included in the table in Appendix 4 was extracted on 5 February 2014.

# 5. Conclusions and Good Practice

Generally, Twitter is used to convey brief, concise messages and communications to the public. The posts were pre-planned rather than instantaneous and urgent. Therefore, there are no apparent reasons for not translating such messages and providing them in Welsh and in English simultaneously on corporate accounts.

A matter which needs further discussion is how messages should be placed on the accounts. The custom is to put the Welsh version first on a bilingual account, but because Twitter shows more recent messages on the top of the screen, the English will be read first as the reader will usually scroll down from the top.

Twitter is an increasingly important method of communicating with the public, therefore it is vitally important that corporate messages are communicated in Welsh and in English to the same timescales.

Twitter is no different to any other form of conveying corporate messages. Looking at the survey findings, we are not convinced that the 'speedy' nature of the media impairs the ability of organizations to plan messages beforehand. The survey shows that a substantial proportion of the organizations in question are already able to do this, therefore the remainder should follow the same pattern.

Cardiff Council maintains separate Welsh and English accounts, and is one example of good practice in maintaining this method. It is evident from following both accounts that forward planning does take place which is proving to be an effective method of maintaining separate Welsh and English streams which mirror each other in content. The advantage is that the Welsh account is separate and easy to follow. The disadvantage is that it is not possible to check whether every message in English is also on the Welsh account without having to follow the English version as well.

On the other hand Gwynedd Council maintains a fully bilingual account apart from when a monolingual message is received, in which case the Council responds in the language of that enquiry. Two things are worth noting with this type of account: Firstly, and as stated above, the English message appears at the top when the Welsh version is placed first. Secondly, as the logo and the font are the same in Welsh and English, it is not easy to see the Welsh version first. As the illustration below shows, there is no difference between how the two languages appear. Therefore it should be considered whether it is necessary to differentiate between Welsh and English in accounts of this type.



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