

Artificial Intelligence and the Welsh Language Part 2 – The Relationship of the Regulator and the Translation Industry with Artificial Intelligence.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Hello, this episode will be in Welsh. If your Welsh isn't up to following along, then we are completely fine with you skipping to the next one.

Hello and welcome to the Exchange, a podcast produced by Audit Wales. I'm Siôn Owen and I work for the Gyfenwidfa Arfer Da.

Audit Wales is the body responsible for auditing the devolved public sector financially and in terms of performance.

That includes the smaller Community Council and the Welsh Government and all other bodies that are between those two poles.

This is the second episode of two, which looks at the field of artificial intelligence and its relationship with the Welsh language.

In the first episode, we chatted with Gruff Prys from Canolfan Bedwyr in Bangor and discussed artificial intelligence, the opportunities, the dangers and the relationship with the Welsh language.

The second chapter looks at two other aspects, namely the regulator relationship and how the translation industry faces the challenge.

In the summer of 2025, the Welsh Language Commissioner made a policy statement about artificial intelligence and the relationship with Welsh language standards.

Osian Llywelyn, Deputy Language Commissioner, was smart enough to come to us to discuss how the advent of new technology is affecting the work of the regulator.

As an organization, as a regulator, how do you see the impact of artificial intelligence on compassionate services?

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Well, I think it's fair to say that it's an early stage. We, like any other regulator in different sectors, have to start addressing the question of how we regulate in a world that is increasingly changing technology is being developed at an extremely rapid scale and we need to enable that to be in a position to respond to that in a timely and proactive manner.

I think in terms of the question in terms of how artificial intelligence has an impact on public services, obviously, the public debate if the focus is on the different models of

artificial intelligence, algorithms, how quickly this technology can provide solutions for all sorts of things.

But from a regulatory perspective I think the most important question for us is how we are and how the technology is

is this going to, or is, changing the expectations of Welsh language users in terms of the services they expect to receive from public institutions, and what kind of experience does that offer the user?

So that's probably the central question for us as a regulator.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

So the main task remains the same but that its nature changes 'lly?

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Certainly the requirements in terms of Welsh language standards, those have been laid down in subordinate legislation and as I often say to institutions; the standard is the standard, standards are the standards and the expectations are consistent regardless of the context in which the standards were first introduced in 2016. We've had a decade after that and the fact that the way public services have changed has been significant and we see that accelerating more now with the advent of artificial intelligence but the plain truth about it is that the duties continue in the same way as they were in 2016.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Is this weak starting to cause you to then adjust the way you regulate 'maybe?

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

As I said, I think we all have a responsibility as regulators to adapt and evolve the way we work.

The fact that artificial intelligence is going to influence the way in which services are delivered, to provide them to consumers. What we need to ensure is that the Welsh language continues to be at the forefront of that and that organisations are planning services in slightly different ways than what they are used to, that the Welsh language is a central consideration and that the Welsh language is not undermined in any way or the statutory duties in adopting this technology and that is actually the basis of our policy statement as a regulator, recognising the opportunities that exist from adopting and taking advantage of this technology, but also recognising some of the risks that are associated with that.

So it's our principle that we describe it as a precautionary principle. We're encouraging innovation, but also highlighting the risks.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

That then fits in to some extent with the way you've adjusted how you've regulated over the last couple of years, where you're a lot more cooperative with organisations.

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Certainly we adopted what we call a method of co-regulation and really what that means is that we want to. Regulation is a multi-sided function of course.

There is a role to investigate and enforce where it is necessary to do so, but that is not the starting point.

We want to work with organisations. We want to work with other partners who have played a role in terms of the Welsh language, when we look at this area in terms of artificial intelligence, it's important that we work not only with the organisations that fall within the scope of our regulatory work, but also the government that has responsibility for language technology.

We work with Canolfan Bedwyr, for example, so there are a range of partners who have an important role to play in this area.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yndi and dwi'n meddwl bod n'n lwcus o pobl mathha Canolfan Bedwyr who are on another episode of this series, a place who works proactively to keep Welsh as a modern language on the internet and who then hope to make your job a little easier. Because in my career you come across new software, and one of the first questions you ask then 'di wel, 'dio'n medru siarad Cymraeg?' or 'dio'n able to output reasonably in Welsh?' 'Ily.

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Oh certainly the working relationship we have with Canolfan Bedwyr is a very positive one and I'm sure that relationship will develop more over the next period.

The fact that we have experts in this field. We don't specialise when it comes to artificial intelligence, we're a regulator. So having that expertise and the working relationship is essential I think in order for us to understand the developments, what's possible, what the risks are, and then be able to apply that to our regulatory context.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Do you see any difference in compliance or something you say in the policy, you still have to comply. Do you see any change in that?

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

I think it's fair to say that it's too early to come to definitive conclusions about that.

We run an annual programme to monitor the compliance of organisations as one would expect. There are sectors and organisations and elements where there is high compliance and we are extremely proud of the work that organisations are doing.

At the other pole. There are places where there are shortcomings and we need to see improvement. That was the case in the context of standards before the advent of artificial intelligence.

To what extent artificial intelligence is going to facilitate some of that. One of the challenges that organisations obviously face in addressing the delivery of services is the capacity of that human resource that is needed to provide services, obviously artificial intelligence offers an opportunity in that regard.

To what extent it has led to an amendment or the other direction, I think it is too early to say, and I think it was important for us to issue our own policy statement to set the direction, but that is an initial direction and like the technology itself, our policy will need to evolve over time.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes because I think that we in general but especially the public services with the technology are in a huge period of flux to an extent where we are under us in the old world. We have the new technology, we have Covid after-effects, all sorts of things going on but the new world hasn't formed yet and there are a lot of things where we have chosen but waiting to see what happens next.

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Nagoes, I think that's certainly true. I think what we're aware of as regulators is that we're in a slightly different position from other regulators.

It's our regulatory framework to an extent set out in subordinate legislation. The standards are there, technology is moving fast.

As a matter of fact, legislation and policy are moving less quickly if I may put it that way. One of the challenges I think for us and possibly for government over the next period is how we ensure that the statutory duties that have been imposed on institutions continue to be relevant and fit for purpose in this new context.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, so eventually: Take advantage of the technology where it works for you, but remember your duties.

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Quite simply, yes, there are quite a few opportunities, and I'm sure there will be more opportunities that will become apparent in the next period, the years to come, but the message to organisations is that our expectations and duties remain exactly the same as they were before the advent of this technology.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Thank you very much.

Osian Llywelyn (Deputy Welsh Language Commissioner)

Thank you very much.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Thanks again to Osian for coming and talking to us.

The industries of sectors that depend on the manipulation of information and words are one of those that are almost always named when smelling change in the wake of artificial intelligence.

LLMs, Large Language Models, are the latest generation after all.

So automating tasks like recording meetings and translating is appealing, especially to those who may not appreciate the craft behind a good piece of text.

The Welsh translation industry is represented by Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru, and they held an event in June 2025 which looked at the implications of technological developments on the translation industry.

And I recently went to the office of Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru to have a chat with its chief officer, Teleri Haf, about the relationship between the Welsh translation industry and artificial intelligence.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

I'm Teleri Haf. I've been the chief officer of the society for about 4 months now, so I'm quite new to the job.

And I'm working here with the administrative manager, Sioned, so both of us and the voluntary board of course run the association.

I've got a lot to learn on the job, but I'm looking forward to the years ahead and they're going to be quite challenging years I think with the technological advances ahead of us.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

And then to start with what Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru is doing?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

'Lly ma' Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru is a national body that leads, develops and promotes professional translation.

We are the only professional association for Welsh translators, whether they were translators at the time or text translators. And we have over 400 members, about 407 at the moment.

And we're organising workshops and training and exams for translators. And we have to sit exams in order to be a member of the society; being a member is a mark of the quality of an individual's ability to translate and a recognition of the professionalism of the translators.

Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year. So we'll be very busy this year organising events to celebrate the special anniversary as well as more workshops and talks and we're very interested to hear from our members to see what they want to do to celebrate this special occasion as well.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Thank you. So 4 months in the job?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

4 months, yes. Still learning.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

As 'na it's going, I'm taking? How does the world look to the society of translators?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Well I expected it to be such a big society to start with that there were 400 members and I didn't realise how active the society was and how much was going on in terms of there were workshops every month, there were conversations over lunch once a month, there was an active board behind us, there were examiners putting in a lot of time to create an exam paper and training.

She's a terrible buffoon, and so many people are part of society.

And I feel very privileged to be a small, small, small part of society.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Oh good, that's very nice to hear; that there's so much life and so much buzz.

But under us in a world that is always changing but under us in a weak world where there is change under us we can see and recognise it in artificial intelligence and the industries and professions of information and language are one of those that come up, such as those that are greatly affected by, artificial intelligence is not.

So how do you as a society react to that?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Well yes, as you say, there's no arguing, things are changing and artificial intelligence is a big pain in the mind for translators. We carried out research with Arad in September and 34% of translators were worried about the future of the craft because of the changes in technology.

Of course there are advantages to artificial intelligence, the efficiency is going to increase, but because of that the big question is will there be enough work for everyone?

I've been talking to several companies recently. At the moment the workflow is good and due to the increased emphasis on offering services bilingually, the increase in the number of Welsh speakers by 2050 we're hoping that the workflow is going to continue to be high.

But of course the role of a translator is going to change. There are a lot of translators already using artificial intelligence. According to the research, 70% were already using artificial intelligence, alongside their translation memory.

Remember we've faced something like this before with Google Translate and so on and everybody panics, but in reality not much has changed. It's been a useful tool for translators, but there's still translators and there's still a demand for translators.

I think what's important is that translators hold hold on to that tool and not the customers; that it's up to the translators to use it to facilitate their own work and they then proof-read and ensure that the quality of the output then still maintains the standards.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes because there are a lot of us who have seen the pictures on social media of bad translations or messages out of people's offices?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

And that's what's wrong with artificial intelligence at the moment, and I'm sure it's going to improve. 'Da ni'm yn wirion, ond does gynna fo'm memory, so ella for example the English word children ella do' o ifeithu fo fel gosod in paragraph 1, fabrik yn para 2, plant yn para 3 ac ella na plantnu oedd ei angen yn yn yn blaen'.

So that's where we stand right now.

And sometimes it takes more time to proof-read something then and translate. So if customers are thinking "Oh let's put it through ChatGPT and we'll get it back cheaper and faster", that's not always the case because it often takes more time.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

No, I support that, experience sometimes you'll give something through automatic translation and you spend more time working out what your original meaning was to compare it to what you've got back and edit and adapt from that tea.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

And what we have to remember is also 'di o'm jyst cyfieithu tetun ma' hyn yn effeithio cyfieithu ar y prydu auch a dwi'r si'r fydd pobl yn arbrofe gyda fo in order to save money get translated at the time but in terms of the Welsh it's difficult to interpret the dialect, spoken language, bratiaith and also convey someone's feelings, because a translator isn't just a translator at the time, he's very often an actor.

Especially in court, I'll never forget our chief examiner Nerys Hurford talking about the difference between being able to misportray someone in court.

For example, if someone says "don't know" in court, well that translates as "I don't know" very differently from "wmbo".

Is it a bus?

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Fysa.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

So, is artificial intelligence going to be able to do that?

I'm thinking.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, and I also saw earlier in my career that I landed up in a booth with a translator at the time having to be very quiet and see them go all the way to that flow state where words come in and flow out seamlessly.

It's amazing how they get that skill.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

In it it is a craft and half in it. And there is a shortage of translators at the time.

We're calling for more translators at the time. So there's plenty of work for everyone at the moment.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

And that's a good thing to hear, isn't it?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

In it.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Because you held a conference to discuss this, and I went there which was a very interesting day and I learned a lot.

But I'm getting a feeling of uncertainty, if not scary, because the narrative is all about 'the world is going to change and maybe you're being left behind', but your point of view is 'well yes' there are threats, but are there opportunities?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Yes definitely, the conference was the beginning of that in an uncertain time and we are still in uncertainty and so we will continue to respond we will hold similar events again as things change and that was a good start:

Getting Hannah Thomas there to discuss what artificial intelligence was and then getting the legal side from Doctor Angharad James and also getting the positive side from Ben Screen from the Health Board who talked about the burden that Health Board interpreters have on a day-to-day basis with so much workload, and how it facilitates them on a day-to-day basis.

So, we're looking at both sides of the conference, it's not just the negative side and we'll be organising similar events. And we're responding to the changes that are underway.

We have just changed our exam paper, a complete exam paper. So, instead of two translation questions, there will be one reading test question. Instead of translating in order to respond to the change in the role of the translator. There will then be e-

reading test workshops to prepare for the exam and we are organising a reading test workshop after artificial intelligence in February, specifically with our chief examiner Fiona Gannon in February and there will be the same English reading test session after artificial intelligence with Meg Ellis in March.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, so, how proactive can you be with things?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Then, and under us we are also open for translators to come to us to ask us to carry out certain things, if there's something that worries them, we'll help under us here to listen, to support and to respond.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, because I remember Ben Screen's presentation, and his statistics of his work, the unit he runs, and going through it was amazing, and just shows the repetitive work and balling. Artificial intelligence is a tool.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

And we've been using it to be honest for years it's no different from the translation memory because the translation memory that translators have is used side by side with Google Translate.

So artificial intelligence will just replace Google Translate. So there's not a lot of change going to be.

But it's good from what everyone I've talked about in terms of translators, everyone says that there's plenty of work at the moment if something is too much work, so it'll be a help cause...

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

I'm about to start moving forward to the opportunities. And it's one of the things that the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner is quite definite in saying that the fact that you can do the translation with artificial intelligence doesn't mean that you're free from your legal implications to provide a service in Welsh and to treat the Welsh language equally.

And ma' 'na gyfle yn fan'na cause 'di'r bulmp gwaith yna yn mynd i nunlla nacdi?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

No, definitely not. And I think what's important is if the output meets the standards and there's a translator who has a reading test and is part of that process, artificial intelligence, Google Translate, translation memory.

It doesn't matter what the technology is?

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

No and in the end there should be a language specialist then?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Definitely. That's what I think will have to be emphasised that you definitely have to have the language specialist there for a reading test in the end.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

As for development and other opportunities in the field I don't know if you're familiar with it. The CDPS is developing, a trio writing method.

So you've got a service designer and the user researcher and language specialist writing. Deud bod chdi'n setio upy servizio digidol a then tibod ma' 'na ma' 'na rôl yn fan' na lle ma' nhw' 'di bring a translator in case that they're language experts. And say "well, dan ni'n mynd i sgwennu'r Gymraeg a'r Saesneg ochr yn ochr o'r llawr i upy" rather than that you're trying to squeeze English text for something and you're fitting in the case boxes or you're translating the meaning, but you need to translate the meaning differently to make sense in the context of the form.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

The human person has to be there, it's not a machine, or the machine doesn't have the sensitivity, the intelligence of a human person's opinion that doesn't exist.

And the person with qualifications who are members of the society must be the centre of that process.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Someone who's passed the exam lly?

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Yes.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

I remember grammar lessons. No.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

But you know we're holding e-workshops now to prepare for the exam so in the e-workshops translators get support and get feedback before applying so that's help.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

It's a case of browsing through the website and ballu. You have the reports after exams and ballu, and you have standards.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Yes but yes and it means a golden standard so when customers see the logo of the association then they know that they are going to get a quality translation and that is what is important and there are a lot of tenders especially from the government now asking the translator to have the qualification or to be a member of the society.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Please join the society if you think you're hard enough to do the job...

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

But as far as the exam is concerned, one other thing we've changed with the exam is to adapt and move forward with the era is to give access to the internet.

So in the 'weak' complete exam translators have access to the web when taking the complete exam. So that also reflects the reality of a translator on a day-to-day basis.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes cause I don't know I'm lost without the online dictionaries de.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Yes yes.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

So: Yes, there's a thing that causes you a little bit of fear as a society or as an industry. But overall it's a picture well this is just another change coming in and there will be an adjustment that will move forward.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Definitely the language needs to move forward with the era?

Technology has to change and the craft and the profession will also have to adapt but translators are not going to disappear, society is not going to disappear, we are going to face this together and adapt and I'm sure there will be a very bright future for the craft and for society in the future.

Sion Owen (Audit Wales)

Well Teleri, thank you very much and thank you for your time.

Teleri Haf (Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru)

Thank you.

Rhian Jones (Audit Wales)

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