Culture Committee – CC-09-02(p1a)

Date: 1 May 2002

Time: 9.00am-12.30pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly for Wales

TRANSLATION AND NORMALISING THE USE OF WELSH

<u>A Note by the Welsh Language Board</u>

1. At the beginning of the review of the Welsh language, the Board presented in a paper several action points for inclusion in a strategy to achieve the aim of creating a bilingual Wales. One of the main points was that the Assembly should make bilingualism a cross-cutting issue in its work. In presenting the paper, the Chair referred specifically to the way in which the Welsh language had been regarded by the Assembly's civil service, as '*little more than something to translate into so far as documents are concerned, and something to translate out of when people choose to speak it publicly*'. In calling for bilingualism to be treated as a cross-cutting issue across every policy field in the Assembly, we also called for an internal unit to be established to ensure that this was implemented; the unit was given this aim: '*more natural bilingual administration – and less translation*'.

2. In the keynote speech *The Prospects for the Welsh Language*, delivered in Cardiff at the end of February, one of the main themes was increasing the use of Welsh. In this context, the Chair made further remarks on translation, and extended his comments to other bodies, as follows:

   "*More remains to be done in the translation field as well. I want to see translation developing as a true service and not just another name for paying lip-service to the language. It is a support service. Encouraging people who are able to speak Welsh to use the language at work is far more important. And if that happens at the expense of translating endless documents, then everyone will rejoice, I hope.*

   *I am not now belittling the translating profession but looking for more imagination and holistic planning from institutions that believe at present that translation is the **only** answer to offering a service in two languages.*

   'Creating a Bilingual Wales' is not a matter of slavish translation. To tell the truth, we

need to see fewer translations of documents that merely gather dust. Creating a bilingual Wales is going to be a far more complex process than that! And we must reconsider translation priorities - in terms of language and in terms of expenditure. The priority for us is to secure more naturally bilingual administration, and more people using the products."

3. We present three recommendations on how the aim of more naturally bilingual administration might be achieved, by considering the function of translation within a broader language planning context.

4. **Every institution should assess the range of its language skills against the availability of its translation service.**

   This is something which already happens when the Board asks bodies to conduct reviews of their Welsh language plans, but it can happen without that stimulus. It is a fact that a proportion of the workforce of every institution providing services to the people of Wales is bilingual. (These proportions vary enormously, of course.) In the Board's opinion, one of the most effective means of normalising the use of Welsh is to enable those who have competence in Welsh to use the language in their work, and to encourage and assist them to do so through training. A simple question that could be asked in every institution is whether it is necessary initially to translate simple letters from Welsh, or are suitable staff available to reply to them naturally in Welsh, without having to use the translation service.

5. **The translation service should be given a central place in the process of treating bilingualism as a cross-cutting issue.**

   Translators work consistently with two languages; it is natural, therefore, to take advantage of their experience and to make the most of it. One must also bear in mind that translators often have other skills to offer: for example, they can help edit and improve texts that have been drafted in Welsh; they can also assist in the process of making bilingual officials more confident to use their Welsh.

6. **Translation work should be prioritised on the basis of positive guidelines in order to decide which work needs to be translated, which work it would be desirable to translate, and which work need not to be translated.**

   The prioritising of translation work is not a new concept for any institution. But it should be done on the basis of positive guidelines, and with holistic consideration being given to balancing the value of more naturally bilingual administration against less unnecessary translation. **This is not acceptable unless the former – more bilingual administration - happens at the expense of the latter – less translation**. Translators can assist in this work too, and they should be encouraged to do so. The main guideline

is increasing the use of Welsh, and providing a service where the need exists. Unless the product is used, then, as a rule, it should not be translated. The other main core considerations, apart from usage, are:

  i. The number of documents to be produced;
  ii. The length of the document;
  iii. The nature and size of the target audience;
  iv. The purpose of the document and its likely effect on the user;
  v. The document's status – considerations of status may sometimes mean that a document must be translated, when, for example, its existence in itself is highly significant – such is the case with a Royal Charter or a Unified Development Plan, even though much **use** may not be made of them in either language;
  vi. The document's longevity (bearing in mind that to translate a notice today announcing an event which took place yesterday is of no use to anyone!).

7. One creative way of testing these recommendations would be to ask the Assembly to adopt them in reviewing its own translation service on the basis of its experience of three years, in the wider context of promoting more naturally bilingual administration by its staff.

Welsh Language Board

April 2002