



William Powell AM
Chair
The Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

6 January 2016

Dear William

Petition P-04-655: "Demanding our Rights for the Welsh Language in the Private Sector"

Thank you for your letter dated 15 December concerning the above petition.

Your letter requests a copy of the timetable for the next steps in the delivery of Welsh language standards for organisations in the private and voluntary sectors.

As you may know, the process of introducing standards has happened so far in a series of rounds:

- There are 26 organisations in Round 1, which are the Welsh Ministers, county councils and county borough councils in Wales and the National Park Authorities.
- There are 119 organisations in Round 2, including health boards, colleges and universities and public bodies in Wales.
- The 64 organisations in Round 3 include social housing providers, UK Government departments, water companies, the Royal Mail Group and the Post Office.

A copy of the timetable for these Rounds are on the Commissioner's website and, while the vast majority of organisations concerned are public sector, Round 3 includes some private organisations such as water companies and the Post Office.

On 2 December 2015, I issued a further statement on my website explaining the next steps for Round 3 and the work programme for 2016 (a copy of the statement is attached). It explains that I will commence standards inspections with the railway and bus sectors in March 2016 and commence standards investigations with the gas and electricity sectors in June.

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You also asked about my response to some questions the petitioners would like the Petitions Committee to ask the First Minister. In particular, the role of the Welsh Language Commissioner in deciding which businesses should be exempt (from the initial timetable).

First, I should note that the petitioners' claim that the Welsh Government has asked me to remove organisations from the list in Round 3 is incorrect. I decided to amend Round 3 with a view to facilitating the process of setting standards and seeking to ensure that the maximum number of organisations possible are included in standards regulations before the recess for Assembly elections. I have corresponded with the petitioners (i.e. The Welsh Language Society) on my work programme for the standards on more than one occasion.

Finally, my role as Commissioner is to conduct standards investigations and determine how and when to investigate, but that is only the first step in the process of setting standards. Before the standards are implemented, I must issue a compliance notice, which is a notice issued to organisations that requires them to comply with one or more standards. I cannot do that until Welsh Ministers have introduced standards regulations that make the standards specifically applicable to the organisations included. The Welsh Language Standards (No. 1) Regulations, which make standards specifically applicable to Welsh Ministers, county councils and National Park authorities, came into force on 31 March 2015 and the Welsh Language Standards (No. 2) Regulations were laid before the Assembly in December. These regulations will make the standards specifically applicable to 32 additional organisations, and I understand there is a vote on them in the Assembly next month.

I hope that this response deals with the questions in your letter.

Yours faithfully

Meri Huws
Welsh Language Commissioner