

Address by Geraint Wyn Parry, Chief Executive of Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru, at the meeting of the Wales Justice Network at the Monmouthshire and District National Eisteddfod 2016

This year, 40 years since Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru's inception, I'm very pleased to join you here at this wonderful National Eisteddfod in Abergavenny to highlight one of the association's key partnerships, namely our close relationship with the Welsh Language Unit of HM Courts & Tribunals Service to benefit the use of the Welsh language in courts and tribunals.

While the relationship goes back years, I intend to focus on what's happened since 2007 when Hywel [Hughes, Head of Welsh Language Services & Communications and Employee Engagement Manager] and I were both fairly new in post.

Late in 2007 Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru received a letter from Judge Eleri Rees, the then Liaison Judge for the Welsh language. She wrote:

"I believe that Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru's decision some two years ago to introduce an examination process for interpreters was an important one in that it established a system of professional accreditation for interpreters and ensured a more consistent standard. It was thus a fairly easy decision for us as a service to change our policy (from April 2008) to choose interpreters for court cases from the association's list of those who have passed its examinations."

We were also asked to hold an interpretation test into Welsh for the purpose of interpreting in the courts as the association's current interpretation test only involves translating into English.

The letter was an important and significant step forward in ensuring that the quality of interpretation in the courts would be protected, that there would be a consistency of standard in the interpretation provided as it would be based on the highest professional standards, and that the rights of individuals would be safeguarded.

In 2013, we were very pleased to be able to contribute to HMCTS's internal discussion which led to the establishment of a new procedure for booking English/Welsh interpreters in courts and tribunals where a Welsh language requirement had been indicated. The resulting new procedure gave courts and tribunals clear guidelines with

regard to hiring the services of qualified English/Welsh interpreters and ensured that the interpreters involved were provided with all relevant information in advance of a case. This process serves as an excellent example of the two professions working in collaboration.

Fast forward to 2015, and Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru's intention to establish a means of acknowledging the Areas of Professional Expertise of its Full and Interpreting members.

Choosing the first area of professional expertise was relatively simple – Court Interpreting.

In choosing this area of expertise we saw an opportunity to further strengthen the important role of interpretation in the courts and all the arrangements which had been put in place since April 2008, as well as strengthening and celebrating the status of professional English/Welsh interpreters in the courts.

I should note at this point that the arrangements for securing the services of English/Welsh interpreters for a court case are different from those for hiring an interpreter for other pairs of languages. An important consideration in choosing this subject area was that the Ministry of Justice in London had started work on renewing its framework agreement for interpreting in the courts. We had no wish to see the robust arrangements established for the use of Welsh in the courts in Wales being overtaken by a large contract which has engendered, and still engenders, a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst both interpreters and the associations and unions representing interpreters.

Our main criterion for acknowledging the professional expertise of our interpreting members in this area is based on the experience each one of them has gained of interpreting in courts and tribunals. As part of this new process we shall also be arranging an annual seminar for interpreters and court staff, providing an opportunity to discuss matters of common concern and for both parties to better understand each other's needs. To introduce new interpreters to the work of the courts and tribunals we also plan to introduce a programme of induction to the work of courts and tribunals. All this, of course, will be done in close co-operation with HMCTS Welsh Language Unit.

This latest development by Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru links in directly with Judge Eleri Rees's letter in 2007 and will strengthen the clear message given in the letter that the professional standards that Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru upholds and promotes are important in courts and tribunals in Wales. It will provide assurance for everyone directly involved in the administration of justice, and the general public, that trustworthy and qualified interpreters are available to undertake the work.

Put simply, Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru's aim is to ensure that English/Welsh interpretation in courts and tribunals is of the highest standard. I'm confident that the close co-operation between Cymdeithas Cyfieithwyr Cymru and HMCTS Welsh Language Unit will ensure that this will happen for years to come.