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David Veryard,  
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### **Interpreting in Microsoft Teams**

Remote interpreting has been the most significant development for the translation/interpreting profession in Wales in 2020 as face-to-face meetings came to an abrupt end due to Covid-19 and virtual meetings took their place just as quickly.

The ability to provide interpreting in a seamless manner in virtual meetings was, therefore, an absolute essential for public sector bodies in Wales - including Welsh Government, local authorities, and health boards - in order that they could comply with their Welsh language standards as set out in law; and to allow all participants in meetings to contribute in their language of choice, which is their right.

Zoom provided an obvious option. However, the major public authorities in Wales do not allow Zoom to be used, and one reason for this is their investment in Microsoft software, including Teams. It has proved extremely frustrating for them that the ability to provide interpreting is not available as an integral component of Microsoft Teams.

Much time and effort has been diverted to finding ways around this problem when Microsoft can provide the solution. As the association for English/Welsh professional translators and interpreters, we are only too aware of the frustrations of our Interpreting Members when they have to interpret in a meeting using Microsoft Teams. Despite the ingenuity and patience of these interpreters in seeking a satisfactory way of providing interpreting, this weakness in Microsoft Teams is having a negative effect.

Meeting organisers, and these include public authorities, do not want the hassle which is involved with arranging interpreting for a meeting using Microsoft Teams. As a result, the Welsh language is being excluded from many meetings. Simply put, this means that Welsh speakers are being prevented from using their mother tongue. And for interpreters, this has meant a serious loss of income in a year when the impact of Covid-19 on them financially has been brutal.

I am aware that Eluned Morgan MS, the Minister responsible for the Welsh language in Welsh Government, wrote to Microsoft Teams earlier this year asking that interpreting be included in Microsoft Teams as a matter of urgency, stating that “this one small piece of work would have enormous positive effects for the development of multilingualism”.



Cymdeithas  
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The Welsh public has also clearly demonstrated that there is a demand, as have citizens of other countries worldwide. As I write, the ‘Add functionality for simultaneous interpretation of audio/video meetings with human interpreters’ petition on the Microsoft Teams UserVoice has attracted 3,012 votes in favour and 710 comments have been made. The call is compelling.

In 2014 Microsoft Translator worked closely with the then National Assembly for Wales (now Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament) to add Welsh to the suite of languages available in Microsoft Translator. Microsoft products have had a Welsh language interface for many years. The opportunity now presents itself for Microsoft to further support the everyday use of the Welsh language by enabling interpreting within Microsoft Teams.

We understand that discussions between Microsoft and Welsh Government have been both positive and productive. Can we now move swiftly to a successful solution?

In Wales we have a long-standing tradition of giving ‘calennig’ on New Year’s Day, ‘calennig’ being a Welsh word meaning New Year celebration or gift, normally given to children as they go from house to house. I can think of no better ‘calennig’ in 2021 than the addition of a means of providing interpreting within Microsoft Teams.

Yours sincerely,

Geraint Wyn Parry  
Chief Executive

Copies to:

Eluned Morgan MS, Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language  
Cindy Rose, President, Microsoft Western Europe  
Jeremy Evas, Uned y Gymraeg, Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government