**Better for business:
how the Welsh Assembly Government Library & Publications Service is transforming its services to fit:**
- **business policy/programme delivery &**
- **business people in Wales.**

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Abstract

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratic body created in 1999 to take over the powers of the Welsh Office bringing real political power to Wales from Westminster, London.

> "With devolution, our destiny as regards health, wealth, education, the environment, and the domestic agenda more widely, is increasingly in our own hands." (Wales: a better country, Welsh Assembly Government, 2004).

The National Assembly meeting in Plenary is the highest political decision-making body. It has delegated most of its "government" functions to the First Minister (who in turn has made delegations to other Ministers). The Cabinet are supported by the devolved administration, the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Assembly Library and Publications Service within the Welsh Assembly Government provides:
- an internal service to support the decision-making, policy development, service delivery and compliance processes of the Assembly Government by making available a extensive range of information resources and providing a high quality advisory service on information and research matters; and

- *an external service to provide and promote public access to Assembly publications and information assets in electronic and hard copy formats.*

Before April 2006 we served approximately 4,500 members of staff and dispatched over 1,000 business related publications per month to external customer requests (in paper and electronic formats).

Programmes and services targeted at the business community in Wales were also delivered by two main, external organisations (quangos ~ quasi-automonous national governmental organisations). In July 2004 the First Minister announced that these organisations would be brought in to the Assembly for April 2006.

This paper will detail the practical steps within our service workplan taken to meet the challenge of our new customer base, both internally and externally. It will highlight the advantages for business and civil servants in being able to access the broad range of what are now "Welsh Assembly Government" publications and information sources. The talk concludes with details of some of the challenges in the future as we seek to further develop our services.

Introduction: a quick guide to devolution in Wales

In July 1997, the Government published a White Paper "A Voice for Wales", which outlined the proposals for devolution in Wales. These proposals were put to a public referendum of 18 September 1997, and with a small but significant majority endorsed.

Once the referendum results came through the major piece of work started in drafting the Government of Wales Act. Parliament passed the Act in 1998 and this established the National Assembly for Wales. The National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999 then enabled the transfer of the devolved powers and responsibilities from the Secretary of State for Wales to the Assembly to take place on July 1st 1999.

The Assembly decides on its priorities and allocates the funds made available to it from the Treasury. Within its powers, the Assembly develops policy and approves legislation which reflects the needs of the people of Wales. Decisions about these issues are made by politicians who are accountable, through the ballot box, to voters in Wales. There are sixty Assembly Members – forty elected in constituencies, twenty elected through regional lists

Wales remains part of the UK and the Secretary of State for Wales and Members of Parliament (MPs) from Welsh constituencies continue to have seats in Westminster. Laws passed by Parliament in Westminster still apply to Wales.

The 60 Assembly Members delegate their executive powers (the making and implementing of decisions and laws) to the First Minister, who is elected by the whole Assembly and therefore usually represents the largest political party. The First Minister in turn delegates responsibility for delivering the executive functions to Assembly Ministers, who form the Cabinet. The Cabinet makes many of the Assembly's day to day decisions, and its Ministers are responsible for individual subject areas such as health and education. The Cabinet is accountable to the rest of the Assembly, which scrutinises all its decisions and actions.

To quote "Wales a Better country" (2003), the Welsh Assembly Government's strategic agenda

> "With devolution, our destiny as regards health, wealth, education, the environment, and the domestic agenda more widely, is increasingly in our own hands."

Welsh Assembly Government officials (civil servants) support the Assembly Cabinet. They help to formulate and implement policies on behalf of the Cabinet, and administer the public services for which the Assembly is directly responsible.
In Wales the Welsh Assembly Government (the First Minister and his Cabinet Ministers) is responsible for:

the National Health Service, local government services, from local transport to social services, education and training, support for economic development, including advice and grants to businesses, road network, planning, environmental protection and the countryside, payments and advice to farmers, arts, culture, welsh language and sport.

Before the advent of the Assembly the Welsh Office (headed by the Secretary of State for Wales) had a Library Service, which was regularly reviewed as to its location and function. The following quotes are taken from two of these reviews:

> "… wondered if agreement could be sought to the use of the Crypt. At the present, this housed the Book of Remembrance, but it was thought that this might be more effectively displayed in the main entrance hall…. said the Crypt was ill-lit and ventilated, but the Library might possibly be relocated there".

> "the concept *(of the library)* is a worthwhile one".

These reveal a little of the ways in which the library was perceived during this period, as a useful and essential service worth relocating, but perhaps not requiring the best accommodation!

The establishment of the Assembly Library & Publications Service in 2002

In 2002 the library and publications service was reorganised to create the "Assembly Library & Publications Service". Teams were organised to reflect the policy portfolios and our external publications services. We also formally separated from the library and research service provided to the Assembly Members (politicians). As part of our establishment as a "new" service we agreed our service aims to provide:

- an internal service to support the decision-making, policy development, service delivery and compliance processes of the Assembly Government by making available a extensive range of information resources and providing a high quality advisory service on information and research matters; and
- an external service to provide and promote public access to Assembly publications and information assets in electronic and hard copy formats

Our business information services were provided to both internal and external customers. Internal services focussed on procurement / tendering information, running credit checks and tracking business activity for the economic policy staff. Our external services focussed on providing any assembly publication to any business, anywhere. Predominately business requests focussed on planning/environment information, guidance and strategic policy.

In addition to the Welsh Assembly Governments work in the business sector programmes and services targeted at the business community in Wales to achieve policy objectives were also delivered by two main, external organisations, quangos ~ quasi-automonous national governmental organisations;
- the Welsh Development Agency and
- the Welsh Tourist Board.

In July 2004 the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan made the following statement:
"The time has come to move the devolution project onwards and upwards. I want to outline to the Assembly our vision for the shape of governance in Wales, starting with the announcement that we intend to incorporate the major executive quangos directly into the Assembly Government.
The Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board and ELWa - National Council will cease to be quangos by 1st April 2006. Their work will of course continue but the accountability for that work will fall to the Minister and not their executive boards."

What did this mean for our business information services?

Over a thousand members of staff would be joining the Welsh Assembly Government from April 2006, all doing work which was new to us with very different information needs (and different ways of fulfilling these needs) and producing different types of information for external customers.

We now needed a work plan to transform our services to fit the new, larger organisation. The senior library team and a project manager from the central mergers project agreed a plan to initiate the following main activities:

1. Map out existing information services and requirements
2. Identify synergies and opportunities in information delivery and procurement
3. Plan for continuity of service for our new, additional 1000 internal business/tourism customers and our external customers to access the wide pool of "Assembly" information.
4. Develop service standards to fit our new customer base.

Map out existing information services and requirements

In order to identify what services would be required post April we undertook a simple information resource/service audit process. We were mindful that many staff in the incoming organisations were receiving multiple requests for information on their internal policies and roles so we designed a simple form to ascertain "who, where, when and how" information needs were fulfilled for internal and external customers.

One of the issues we faced was to identify the appropriate individuals to contact as part of the audit process, and our merger team set up a workshop; for us to meet with our new colleagues face to face to facilitate communication.

In order to understand the types of services offered we undertook a brief "Mystery shopper" exercise for public facing services with the incoming organisations. This added detail to the information gathered within the audit and helped us distinguish between specific tailored services to market segments as opposed to more general "first stop shop" services.

As a team we were mindful of the cultural difficulties that our audit would cause – the incoming staff were worried about the future delivery mechanisms of their information services. This meant the approaches we made needed to reassure individuals of the key aim in our transformation; to ensure that users had access to the information they needed, both for internal staff and external customers from day one of the merger.

Identify synergies and opportunities in information delivery and procurement

With the results of the audit we started more detailed work to compare and contrast the range of information sources procured. Here we were conscious of the need to join up subscriptions where possible, to reduce duplicate spending on resources / information.

As we gathered information on the resources procured we identified a major challenge for our service. We would need to become familiar with 9 new major information resources and make them available via our intranet -none of which we currently required for our service delivery. This emphasised the new resources and skills we needed to acquire to offer services to our new internal customers.

We also recognised that due to the complexity of the range of information needs some of the work that needed to be done would be better undertaken by establishing an information procurement project for 2006-2007, so that all areas of information resources were being procured based on need.

Plan for continuity of service – Day one

For April 1st 2006 we would be required to offer services to internal and external customers – seamlessly. To get this right the library management set up a "time out" meeting for all library and publications staff of the to consider what we needed to do to and the following actions were agreed:

External services
1. Set up an additional 5 phone lines to deal with external requests
2. Name contacts in the incoming organisation to pass requests on to if we hadn't got a copy of the publication
3. Obtain electronic versions of as many publications as possible from each of the organisations and add to our catalogue
4. Work on making our OPAC available externally
5. Amend rotas to ensure more staff available to take calls.
6. Visits to departments to see what publications are stored and requesting hard copies of high volume or non electronic older materials.

7. Amend the Welsh Assembly Government "Publication Scheme" and internet pages to encourage access to publications and information from the whole, larger organisation.

Internal services
1. Raise awareness of the change for the incoming staff by visiting sites across Wales with demonstrations and information packs
2. Create an area on our intranet site for the new staff with a range of communication channels – a new email enquiry form, telephone helpline and named individuals to assist with information need fulfilment.
3. Training for our team on the new resources
4. Contact other services to see if they could provide expert advice on business information if our knowledge was insufficient

Library and publications staff indicated that one of the most important issues for them was to feel that the senior team were there to provide backup and support throughout the process.

Developing service standards to fit our new customer base

The Assembly Library & Publications service established Service Level Agreements with each Welsh Assembly Government Department during 2004/5. We used these agreements to reassure the new departments that we would be able to tailor our provision to meet their requirements. Importantly they make our service standards explicit and emphasises the assistance we provide to lawyers, as part of the service they receive.

The agreements are also key in clarifying our external role - providing their (departmental) publications and information to external customers. They also communicate the responsibilities held in allowing external customers to obtain information under our Publication Scheme commitments.

What happened?

We have been gathering metrics on increases in activity, and the PowerPoint presentation accompanying this paper will include graphical representations of the increased volume of transactions that have occurred.

On a qualitative basis we have been capturing comments from customers to add colour to the metrics gathered. Our postcards to external customers have provided useful evidence of our success in meeting the additional more varied demand, for example:

"Thanks for the prompt reply, the information is exactly what I was after. If you are ever up in N. Wales and passing Trawsfynydd Lake, please feel free to stop off at *(our Adventure Centre)* and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee on the house!"

Internally the following email chain which we received during our first week of providing business information internally has been useful to demonstrate to our senior managers the effectiveness of our workplan:

"Going on the principle that if you find someone helpful you should keep on pestering them, could you help me with some questions... Unfortunately the time scale for this is very tight - anything you could get to me by mid afternoon tomorrow would be great."
(10 minutes later…)
"Thanks for this - appreciate your work especially given the tight time scale."

Next steps

Transforming the Assembly Library and Publications Service for our internal and external business customers is an ongoing process. The priorities in our plan for the year to further this are:
- The information procurement project – so we realise efficiencies and create an uplift in services from joint procurement
- Reconfiguring our teams to fit the shift and increase in customer demands
- Tailoring our external OPAC and intranet OPAC to fit each department and external business clients
- Populating our "Marketing Calendar" with messages, events and training opportunities tailored for business information and
- Further evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the new services.

The transformation process hasn't resulted in an increase in our "size" (staffing, space and/or collections) by 30% (the increase in business customers). Instead we are meeting the challenge of providing specialist business information services by increasing our knowledge, applying our experience of customer service and by listening to customers to anticipate future needs. The following quote from Schopenhauer has been inspirational, as arranging our service "well" and taking time to apply knowledge and thought has been the central to achieving the opportunities that an increased customer base has presented.

"Just as the largest library, badly arranged, is not so useful as a very moderate one that is well arranged, so the greatest amount of knowledge, if not elaborated by our own thoughts, is worth much less than a far smaller volume that has been abundantly and repeatedly thought over."
Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), German philosopher. Parerga and Paralipomena, vol. 2, ch. 22, sct. 257 (1851).
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