



Welsh Government's AI Trial A Model of Collaboration and Innovation.

During September 2023 – December 2024, the Welsh Government's Digital, Data and Technology directorate launched a pioneering trial of Microsoft 365 Copilot, marking a bold step in public-sector innovation.

What made this initiative stand out was its commitment to Social Partnership working through collaboration, transparency, and inclusivity anchored by early and active engagement with trade unions.

Trade union representatives were consulted and given Copilot access ahead of the trial. They were also included in the dedicated Copilot Teams channel, which provided real-time visibility to user feedback, FAQs, training information, and technical updates. This arrangement allowed them to monitor Copilot usage within the organisation and address potential concerns promptly.

Trade union representatives received early access to survey feedback data, which enabled them to participate in interpreting the results and determining subsequent actions. They were also consulted in the development of an Equality Impact Assessment by engaging users and incorporating their feedback into the final analysis.

The Early Access Program deployed 300 Copilot licences, with trade union representatives among the first cohort of users. Crucially, licences were also reserved for neurodivergent users and staff requiring workplace adjustments, ensuring equitable access from the outset. Between September and December 2024, the Welsh Government scaled up its involvement by joining the UK's largest cross-government Copilot trial, with nearly

1,500 staff participating. Trade unions were actively engaged throughout the extended trial period and played a key role in deciding the licence allocation strategy, ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and alignment with Social Partnership principles.

Monthly surveys and feedback sessions created a continuous loop of insight, with findings shared openly with trade unions and senior leaders. The Chief Digital Officer and Deputy Directors met with union representatives to keep them informed of plans. This approach encouraged trust, accelerated decision making, and aligned seamlessly with the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act.

The results were striking, users reported notable gains in productivity and job satisfaction. Trade unions praised the transparent, inclusive process as a model for future digital projects.

This trial showed that innovation succeeds with strong Social Partnership. The Welsh Government included trade unions from the start and kept communication open, setting an example for responsible, people-centred technology adoption. The Copilot initiative is a model of progressive, inclusive public sector transformation, showing that technology and collaboration can drive lasting impact.

