



Ein cyf/Our ref KW/00088/20

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Dear Mike Hedges AM,

Thank you for your email of 17 January 2020 enquiring about Welsh Government funding for British Sign Language (BSL) courses. I am also taking this opportunity to respond to your request, issued in Plenary 21 January, for 'a statement on British Sign Language and the provision of courses, for the parents of deaf children'.

Independent Review of provision:

As you will be aware, the '*Independent Review of BSL for Adults in Wales*' was published recently. It is clear from the Report that provision for British Sign Language training for Adults in Wales is complex and inconsistent. As noted in the report, cuts in post-16 funding, due to austerity measures, have inevitably contributed to a reduction in BSL provision over the last five years. Currently around half of all adult BSL courses in Wales are fully funded by the Welsh Government, with 40 per cent partly funded, leaving only a small proportion not funded at all¹.

In total, there are reported to be around 7,500 people who use BSL in Wales, of whom around 4,000 are D/deaf². However, as noted above, BSL provision is patchy across

¹ Source: *People and Work BSL data collection template 2019*

² *Deaf - with a capital "D" is used to refer to people who identify themselves as part of the Deaf Community and who usually actively use BSL.*

Wales. The Welsh Government does not currently have a policy for the provision of post-19 BSL learning provision. This means that Adult Community Learning partnerships, Local Authorities and Further Education Colleges are free to determine their planned activity in line with local demand.

Current BSL Provision:

Some Local Authorities, Anglesey, Caerphilly, Conwy, Denbighshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Pembrokeshire and Wrexham, report that they provide no BSL provision. However, in some of these areas providers meet demand by signposting learners to provision elsewhere; for example, Conwy and Denbighshire have a referral system to Adult Learning Wales, Coleg Cambria refers learners to Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. In support of this, Conwy allocates a portion of its Community Learning Grant to Grŵp Llandrillo Menai which has been used for the provision of BSL³. As such, Welsh Government funding is applied to BSL provision from non-accredited/ entry level up to level 4.

Operational data suggests that approximately £107,000 of Welsh Government funding was used to support the provision of BSL for adults in FE Institutions in 2018/19⁴. However, the actual figure is likely to be higher than this as this does not take into account the provision delivered within the community, or provision that is partly-funded as we do not capture that information.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify, assess and make provision for children with SEN. This includes responsibility for ensuring that appropriately qualified staff are available in schools where a learner has been identified as requiring BSL provision. Funding is provided through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) to allow local authorities to meet their statutory duties regarding special educational needs provision. The RSG allows flexibility to deliver services to meet local needs and the discretion to fund specific support as required. However, provision is often driven more by the availability of funding, including providers' interpretations about what can be funded, and also the availability of appropriately qualified tutors, rather than demand

Action taken:

As you are aware, the Welsh Government formally recognised BSL as a language in its own right in January 2004. Since then we have supported training to increase the number of qualified interpreters in Wales, and ensured that legislation, policies and programmes across the Welsh Government recognise the importance of accessible communications. However, we recognise that more could be done to develop a co-ordinated approach to promotion and support for BSL, both internally across Welsh Government departments and externally with other partners.

My officials are currently examining the issues raised in the report, to determine what resource will be required to answer the recommendations, with the aim of coming up with a

³ A breakdown of BSL provision by provider setting out the levels currently provided, number of learners, and where Welsh Government funding is applied is attached below at Annex 1.

⁴ This data is operational and therefore subject to change. It should not be re-used or published.

workable forward plan. The plan is to bring together the work taking place across Welsh Government to ensure a cohesive and holistic approach to BSL provision, identifying actions to be taken to make improvements in relation to BSL training and service provision, with a view to releasing a position statement in the Spring.

The Deffo! petition:

I am aware of a number of issues currently being faced and highlighted by members of the deaf community in relation to BSL. The Deffo! Petition⁵ which dates back to 2015, was considered most recently by the Assembly Petitions Committee in October 2018. The committee made four recommendations around concerns held by the deaf community in Wales.

To partly address these concerns officials are considering options around adopting a national charter for the delivery of services and resources to deaf children, young people and their families. The charter will need to be broad and flexible enough to reflect changing circumstances and future developments, supporting the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. Our options include the possibility of signing up to and promoting existing charters approved by d/Deaf organisations, for example The British Deaf Association's BSL Charter.

You will also be aware that BSL is actively being considered in the new curriculum being developed for schools and settings in Wales, specifically as part of the Literacy, Languages and Communication Area of Learning Experience. Further detail on my plans for the new curriculum are due to be released shortly.

I am aware of other issues including a lack of interpreters; the desire to see BSL included on the curriculum; and provision of BSL training for parents of deaf children. Inevitably, budgetary constraints will restrict our ability to address all the issues raised as quickly and completely as we might hope, and recent discussions with individuals concerned and organisations which represent them have demonstrated that opinions vary regarding what should be the priority.

Cross departmental policy development:

In recognition of the difficulties faced by individuals with hearing loss, the *All Wales Standards for Accessible Communication and Information for People with Sensory Loss*⁶ was launched by the Welsh Government in December 2013. The purpose of these standards is to ensure that the communication and information needs of people with a sensory loss are met when accessing services. For example, they provide guidance to NHS staff on how to ensure patients' information and communication support needs are met, which include BSL. All Health Boards and Trusts are expected to put in place implementation arrangements to deliver on the standards to ensure all services are accessible and available including the deaf community through the communication medium of choice.

⁵ P-04-628 To improve access to education and services in British Sign Language

⁶ https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/all-wales-standards-for-accessible-communication-and-information-for-people-with-sensory-loss-large-print_0.pdf

The Welsh Government has made clear the importance of driving progress on the Standards and continues to work with the NHS organisations and its third sector partners, to implement and monitor the Standards through our National Outcomes Framework⁷ and a range of other approaches. The framework includes a measure for reporting progress on the Standards across all the LHBs and Trusts but not specifically on BSL Interpretation demand.

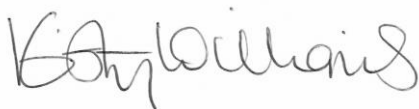
In the UK, Wales has established a reputation as being a leader in the development and provision of hearing health care – the hearing plan developed by colleagues in the field of Health is a first for the UK. Hearing loss at any age can be devastating and negatively impact levels of communication and as a result can leave people feeling isolated and detached from the world around them.

Early intervention and diagnosis is paramount for the health and well-being of these individuals. The plan commits the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to implement agreed action, to do everything we can to prevent ear problems and ensure people are diagnosed and treated in a timely manner. This includes general advice on ear health care and good quality screening.

In 2015-16, the Welsh Government worked with health board professionals to scope services across Wales for people who are D/deaf or have hearing loss. This informed the development of the *Framework of Action for Wales 2017-2020: Integrated framework of care and support for people who are D/deaf or living with hearing loss*. A Project Board was set up to steer action and provide advice to the Welsh Government, NHS Wales and local authorities on the implementation of the Framework. Work will progress through a Project Board to ensure agreed national action happens across Wales.

I trust this letter and Annex provides some clarity as to the actions taken and proposed by Welsh Government, the support currently available, and our intended next steps.

Yours sincerely,



Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education

⁷ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/nhs-wales-delivery-framework-and-reporting-guidance-2019-2020-march-2019.pdf>

Annex 1**BSL Provision in Wales by provider:**

	Levels currently delivered	Mode of delivery	# of learners / year	Costs (£) per hour*	WG funding
Group Llandrillo Menai (FEI)	Mainly 1 but some provision up to 4	Classroom	450	50-55	Partly and fully
Coleg Gwent (FEI)	Non accredited and 1	Classroom	127	52-104	Partly and non- full cost recovery
CAVC (FEI)	1	Classroom	47	50	Fully
Coleg y Cymoedd (FEI)	1,2	Classroom	40	***	Partly
Pembrokeshire (FEI)	1,2,3	Classroom	35	34-110	Partly and none - full cost recovery
Carmarthen (LA)	1	Classroom	9	115	Fully
Gower (FEI)	1	Classroom		66-180	
Cambria (FEI)	No provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ceredigion (LA)	Non-accredited 1,2,3	Classroom	67	40-65	Partly
Monmouth (LA)	Non accredited	Classroom	5	80-120	None - full cost recovery
NPT (LA)	Non-accredited and 1,2,3	Classroom		£100**	Fully also franchise agreement with Agored
Newport (LA)	Non-accredited and 1	Classroom			
Caerphilly (LA)	No provision	Classroom	N/A	N/A	N/A
Conwy (LA)	None (although links to ALW)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Denbighshire (LA)	None (although links to ALW)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ynys Mon (LA)	No provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Merthyr Tydfil (LA)	No provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pembrokeshire (LA)	No provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wrexham (LA)	No provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adult Learning Wales (3rd Sector)	Accredited level 1	Classroom	175	****	Fully funded
Community Learning Wales (3rd sector)	1,2,3,4,5,6	Classroom	100-120	5**	None - full cost recovery
Wales Council for Deaf People (3rd sector)	1, 2	Classroom	21	60-80	None - full cost recovery
National Deaf Children's Society (3rd sector)	Non accredited	Classroom	3	17	None -full cost recovery
ABSLTA (3rd sector)	No provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: People and Work BSL data collection template and interview responses 2019.

Notes:

In 2018/19, the Welsh Government provided over £107,000 in funding for the provision of BSL in FE Institutions in Wales.

Learners undertook courses at the following Institutions:

- *Grŵp Llandrillo Menai;*
- *Pembrokeshire College;*
- *Bridgend College;*
- *Grŵp NPTC Group;*
- *Coleg y Cymoedd; and*
- *Adult Learning Wales*

Provision was also delivered by local authorities as part of their adult learning in the community provision funded through the Community Learning Grant, but we do not collect the data necessary to provide further information on this.

Learners access this provision through prospectuses and general enquiries.

**This information is based on operational data and could change, and should not be re-used/published.*