
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and Social Justice Committee

Bil Iaith Arwyddion Prydain (Cymru) | British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan Dr Julia Terry | Evidence from Dr Julia Terry

What are your views on the general principles of the Bill?

I welcome the overall aim of the Bill, which is to promote and facilitate the use of British Sign Language (BSL) in Wales. The Bill has the potential to improve equality, accessibility, and inclusion for BSL users by placing duties on Welsh Ministers and public bodies, which does not currently exist at present.

I have focused my research career on the health inequalities that Deaf people, particularly BSL users experiences, because they are such a disadvantaged population.

The general principles align with commitments to human rights and equal opportunities. However, the success of the Bill will depend on sufficient resources, clear guidance, and strong accountability measures.

In summary, I support the intent of the Bill but highlight the need to ensure it is fully implemented in practice. Welsh language users have an active offer, BSL users do not and are continually disadvantaged across all areas of society, so a BSL Bill and accompanying structures are needed by law.

What are your views on the Bill's key provisions (set out below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

I support the general principles of the Bill. It recognises BSL as an important language of Wales and seeks to improve equality, accessibility, and inclusion for Deaf people. By placing duties on Welsh Ministers and public bodies, the Bill creates a clear framework for promoting and facilitating BSL.

The principles are sound, but their success will depend on effective implementation, sufficient resources, and meaningful involvement of the BSL community.

What are your views on the Bill's key provisions (set out below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

1 – A duty on Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL

This duty is welcome and sets an important tone. Its effectiveness will depend on how it translates into concrete actions such as awareness campaigns, training, and service

provision. It will also ensure that far more Welsh ministers are Deaf aware, and know about the impact of inequalities that Deaf people experience.

2 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to publish national strategy and guidance

A National Strategy will be essential to provide a clear, long-term framework. It should set measurable objectives and be co-produced with BSL users. This will help to ensure that people can seek guidance to ensure implementation, and also that Deaf people are more aware of their rights.

3 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to publish BSL guidance

Guidance will help public bodies understand their responsibilities. It will be important for the guidance to be practical, accessible, and consistent across Wales, which will be of huge benefit to many organisations in health, care, education and the third sector.

4 - A duty on specified public bodies to publish BSL plans

Requiring BSL plans is a positive step, but smaller organisations may need additional support to meet this duty. Monitoring and accountability will be key. Time and again we are seeing organisations welcome the idea of publishing their plans, and guidance in BSL, as currently they have little knowledge on how to do this.

5 - The appointment of a BSL adviser

An adviser can provide expert oversight and ensure the voice of the BSL community is central. Independence and representation will be critical. I would strongly suggest this appointment is a BSL native user, and that the panel is comprised mostly of Deaf BSL users.

6 - Reporting duties to be imposed on the public bodies and Welsh Ministers in relation to these duties.

Reporting will increase transparency. It will be important that reporting requirements are proportionate and that findings lead to action, not just paperwork. Please recall here the Accessible Communication Standards from 2013 that have been almost non-existent, requiring a full overhaul.

How appropriate are the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate Legislation?

It is reasonable for Welsh Ministers to have powers to make subordinate legislation, as this allows flexibility. Safeguards should ensure transparency and scrutiny, so that significant decisions are subject to appropriate oversight.

Are there any barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and does the Bill take account of them?

Potential barriers include funding, the availability of qualified interpreters, and the need for training across public services. There may also be challenges in ensuring consistent practice

across different bodies. The Bill should be backed with resources and a strong implementation plan. There needs to be significant investment in training and encouraging new BSL interpreters as well as Deaf BSL translators and Deaf BSL tutors. We have many people with strong knowledge and skills who lack the support and resource to gain qualifications and develop; so their skills and knowledge transfer can be of wider benefit.

What are your views on the assessment of the financial implications of the Bill as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum?

The financial memorandum recognises costs, but there is a risk they may be underestimated. Public bodies may face additional expenses for training, interpretation, and reporting. These costs should be seen as an investment in equality, but realistic resourcing is crucial.

Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum?

We need to change societies views about deafness. When parents are told their child is deaf in the early years, being told 'I'm sorry' as the first thing families hear is not acceptable. We need to recognise the value and contribution of Deaf individuals as with people across all populations. Please know that all our health and social care professional programs in Wales have a way to go in preparing all new workers to be Deaf aware. Investing in Deaf role models in Wales, preparing and supporting Deaf people to teach BSL, to work with deaf children and young people, and to closely support older Deaf people is key. We have many untapped resources.

Anything else?