

## Welsh Government Response to: Petitions Committee Report on petition P-04-628 To Improve Access to Education and Services in British Sign Language – November 2018

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

### Recommendation 1

**The Welsh Government should support British Sign Language as a minority language, and encourage local authorities to recognise it as the first language of many Deaf children and young people when providing support and education.**

#### Response: Accept

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 have sought to ensure that policies and programmes across the Welsh Government recognise the importance of accessible communications. We acknowledge that there are a number of issues currently being faced by members of the D/deaf community in Wales in relation to BSL including a shortage of BSL interpreters. To address this we will be reviewing the provision of BSL in Wales and will work with local authorities and other partners to consider developing a national charter for delivery of services and resources to D/deaf children, young people and their families as part of this process. We envisage that such a charter would provide the basis for a range of work being undertaken by the Welsh Government and other bodies, to understand the current provision of support for D/deaf and hearing impaired children and the good practice guidance and standards being developed on D/deaf hearing loss to support the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The charter would need to be broad and flexible enough to reflect changing circumstances and future developments.

**Financial Implications:** None.

### Recommendation 2

**We recommend that the Welsh Government gives consideration to the development of a national charter for delivery of services and resources, including education, to Deaf children and young people and their families. We believe that such a charter, underpinned by the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, would enable Local Authorities to plan and resource support within a nationally recognised framework, and help to ensure consistency of provision throughout Wales.**

#### Response: Accept

As set out in the response to Recommendation 1, the Welsh Government formally recognised BSL as a language in its own right in 2004. We have, subsequently, supported training to increase the number of qualified interpreters in Wales, while working to embed recognition of accessible communications in development and delivery of Welsh Government policies and programmes. However, we acknowledge that there are still a number of issues faced by members of the D/deaf community in Wales in relation to BSL including a shortage of interpreters. As such, we will look to review the provision of BSL in Wales and work with local authorities and other partners to consider developing a national charter for delivery of services and resources to D/deaf children, young people and their families as part of this process. We expect that this charter would provide the basis for a

range of work being undertaken by the Welsh Government and other bodies, to understand the current provision of support for D/deaf and hearing impaired children and the good practice guidance and standards being developed on D/deaf hearing loss to support the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. We would expect the charter to be broad and flexible enough to reflect future developments and changing circumstances.

**Financial Implications:** None.

### **Recommendation 3**

**We welcome that the Welsh Government has indicated that British Sign Language 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. We therefore recommend that the opportunity to learn British Sign Language is made available to children at all levels of education. As part of this we encourage the Welsh Government to continue to explore the creation of GCSE first-language sign language with Qualifications Wales.**

### **Response: Accept in Principle**

The new curriculum for Wales will allow schools to develop curricula which meet the needs and reflect the interests of their pupils. The Area of Learning and Experience for Languages, Literacy and Communication is being designed and developed by a group of pioneer schools, which includes strong representation from special schools to include Welsh, English and international languages. The term international languages is being used in order to encompass a wide range of languages including modern languages, British Sign Language and classical languages. Which international language(s) are taught will be a decision made at school level.

BSL has been recognised by the Welsh Government as a language in its own right, since January 2004. There are a number of level 1 and 2 BSL qualifications approved for teaching at key stage 4 and post-16 in Wales, many of which are equivalent to GCSEs and which schools and further education colleges may decide to include in the key stage 4 and post 16 local curriculum offer to learners. The responsibility for ensuring that BSL is available to children, who have been identified as requiring such needs, rests with local authorities. Many local authorities and further education colleges provide BSL training, including the delivery of BSL courses to adults.

In terms of developing a BSL qualification, it is the responsibility of Qualifications Wales, as the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales rather than the Welsh Government, to develop qualifications for teaching in Wales. In 2017, the First Minister wrote to the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales about the possibility of developing a BSL GCSE qualification. A copy of the letter and the reply from the Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales can be found on the Qualifications Wales website at:

<http://qualificationswales.org/media/2450/first-minister-s-letter-regarding-british-sign-language-bsl.pdf>.

**Financial Implications:** None.

### **Recommendation 4**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government continues its engagement with the Welsh Local Government Association on Workforce Planning for SEN specialist services, with a particular focus on teachers working with Deaf and hard of hearing children**

**and young people. This should include consideration of the longer term sustainability of these services. As part of this we support the introduction of a minimum standard BSL qualification for learning assistants supporting Deaf children and young people.**

**Response: Accept**

In July 2018 we published a report of a data collection, which we commissioned from Data Unit – Wales, providing information on the local authority based specialist workforce. Hearing impairment is among the specialisms included in the data collection which will assist local authorities in planning their workforce and identifying training needs.

We are fully committed to supporting the training of teachers of the Deaf. This year we have allocated a total of £289,000 over three years to support professional training of the local authority based sensory workforce. This funding includes training in British Sign Language (BSL) at various levels, and post-graduate training for six teachers of the Deaf.

January 2018 saw the enactment of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act which will create an improved system for children with additional learning needs (ALN), including those with a hearing impairment. The Act has fairness and equity at its core and aims to ensure all learners are supported to reach their full potential. The legislative framework places learners' needs, views, wishes and feelings at the heart of the planning process. The Act is expected to come into force from September 2020 and the phased implementation period will last until 2023. Until then, local authorities must ensure they continue to comply with the duties placed upon them by the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales.

During the 2018 autumn term we will be consulting on draft professional standards for assisting teaching. We anticipate these standards will be ready for use in schools from September 2019. The draft standards do not include specific qualifications such as BSL as to do so would be impractical and potentially inequitable. However, career-long professional learning is one of the five dimensions of these standards and is relevant to meeting the needs of all learners. Headteachers' responsibility to facilitate this is contained within the career-long professional learning dimension of the formal leadership standards. The importance of meeting the needs of all learners is also referred to in the overarching values and dispositions which accompany the standards. For Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) they include a commitment to the achievement of every learner and the needs and rights of learners being central to the TA's/HLTAs approach to their role.

**Financial Implications:** None.