

# Betting on deaf children's futures: how far are the Scottish and Welsh approaches ensuring the inclusion of BSL in deaf education?

Rachel O'Neill University of Edinburgh  
Dr Rob Wilks Cardiff University



# The research question



How does the approach of the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales to language planning support the promotion and encouragement of BSL in deaf education?



## Sub-questions

- What approach(es) do Scotland and Wales take to language planning?
- How do key stakeholders in Scotland and Wales conceptualise BSL in terms of *deaf-disabled* and *language-minority* rights?
- To what extent does the *deaf-disabled* paradigm persist in Scotland and Wales in the context of deaf education?
- What role do national bodies, local authorities and parents of deaf children have in relation to deaf children's use of BSL and bilingual potential?

# Two phases

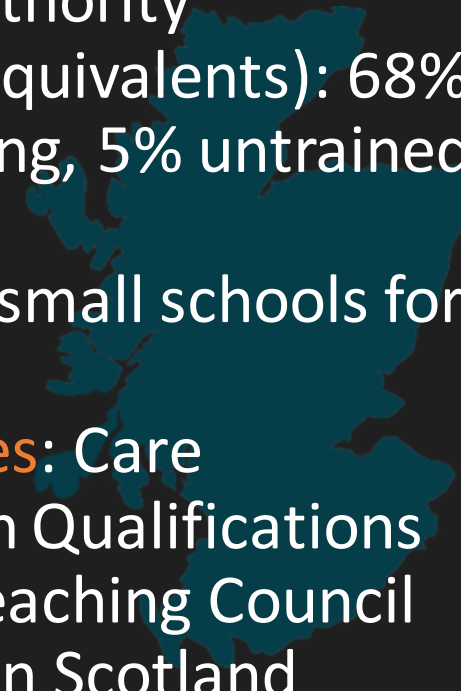
## Phase 1

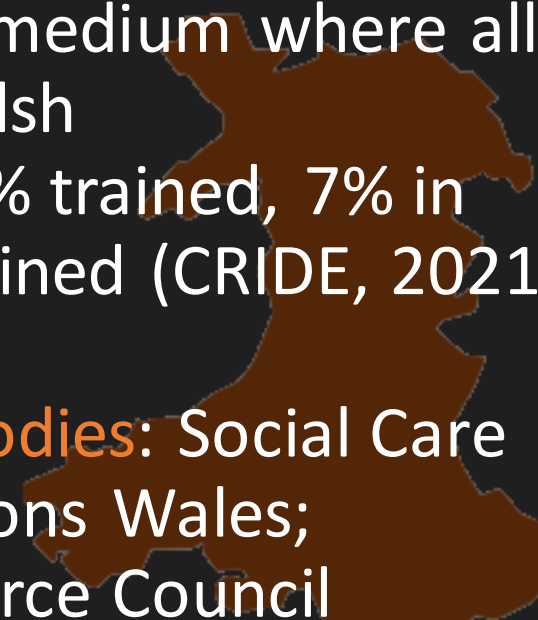
- Documentary analysis of BSL plans and Deaf Teachers' Group chat history
- Report published November 2021
- Binary attitudes towards BSL and English
- Deaf teachers' struggles to qualify
- 14 recommendations

## Phase 2

- Themes identified in Phase 1 required further examination, particularly:
  - The conceptualisation of BSL as a language
- 18 interviews with 21 stakeholders in Wales and Scotland in government, national public bodies, local authorities, schools, colleges and universities and third sector
- Published October 2022

# Comparing the education systems of Scotland and Wales

- **Key principle in Scotland** is the presumption of mainstreaming
  - Does not apply to Gaelic-Medium Education. Parents can request placement in Gaelic Medium Schools outside their local authority
  - **ToDs** (132 Full Time Equivalents): 68% trained, 27% in training, 5% untrained (CRIDE, 2021)
  - 14 resource bases, 3 small schools for deaf children
  - **Relevant public bodies:** Care Inspectorate; Scottish Qualifications Authority; General Teaching Council of Scotland; Education Scotland
- 

- **Key principle in Wales** is bilingualism in English and Welsh. All children learn Welsh. Mainstreaming for deaf children.
  - Parents can choose Welsh-medium school or English-medium where all children learn Welsh
  - **ToDs** (60 FTE): 91% trained, 7% in training, 2% untrained (CRIDE, 2021)
  - 20 resource bases
  - **Relevant public bodies:** Social Care Wales; Qualifications Wales; Education Workforce Council
- 

# The Scottish approach



## BSL (Scotland) Act 2015

- Aims to promote use and understanding of BSL
- Requires the Scottish Government to prepare and publish a national plan in relation to BSL, which is expected to set out their BSL strategy
- Requires public authorities
  - to prepare and publish own BSL plans
  - setting out measures to be taken in relation to the use of BSL
- Scottish Government must publish national plan every six years
- Similar to Gaelic, Act does not establish any rights in education, even though this was a key concern of deaf campaigners

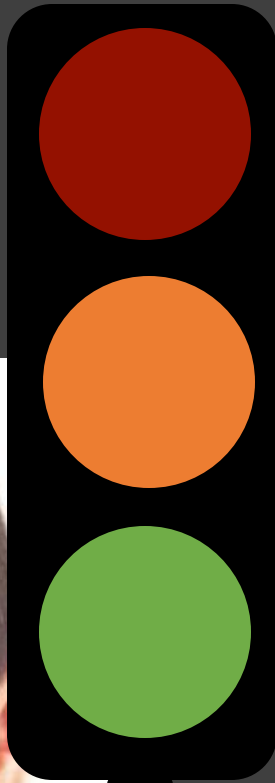
(De Meulder et al, 2019; Wilks, 2020)

# National BSL Plan



- Current plan 2017-2023
- Goals related to deaf education
  - Early Family resources in BSL: Councils (Goals 10-13)
  - GTCS to remove barriers for BSL users to become registered teachers (Goal 16)
  - Education Scotland to lead on work with parents who use BSL so they can get involved in their child's learning (Goals 20-21)
  - Scottish ministers to look into level of BSL held by teachers and support staff of deaf children in schools (Goal 17)
  - Scottish Qualifications Authority to develop an initial suite of awards in BSL (Goal 19)
  - Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT) to lead work to support BSL learning for hearing pupils. (Goals 23-24)
  - Scottish Funding Council to support colleges and universities in developing BSL plans (Goal 26)
  - Student Award Agency Scotland (SAAS) to offer accessible advice and guidance to students who use BSL (Goal 27).

# National BSL Plan



- Current plan 2017-2023
- Goals related to deaf education
  - Early Family resources in BSL: Councils (Goals 10-13)
  - GTCS to remove barriers for BSL users to become registered teachers (Goal 16)
  - Education Scotland to lead on work with parents who use BSL so they can get involved in their child's learning (Goals 20-21)
  - Scottish ministers to look into level of BSL held by teachers and support staff of deaf children in schools (Goal 17)
  - Scottish Qualifications Authority to develop an initial suite of awards in BSL (Goal 19)
  - Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT) to lead work to support BSL learning for hearing pupils. (Goals 23-24)
  - Scottish Funding Council to support colleges and universities in developing BSL plans (Goal 26)
  - Student Award Agency Scotland (SAAS) to offer accessible advice and guidance to students who use BSL (Goal 27).



# Curriculum for Excellence

- Scottish Government sets guidelines about school curriculum
- Four Capacities
- 3 core subjects: literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing
- Curriculum entitlements
- Eight curriculum areas
- Languages: 1+2 approach; L1 – speak at home; L2 – choose from 8 languages; L3 - second additional language subject to availability, **can include BSL**



curriculum for excellence

- > SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS
- > CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS
- > RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS
- > EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

[www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk](http://www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk)

# What's next for Scotland?

Scottish Government will soon consult on competencies for ToDs

Second national BSL plan: aim to include focus on our findings, i.e. Early Years focus and BSL being used in the classroom

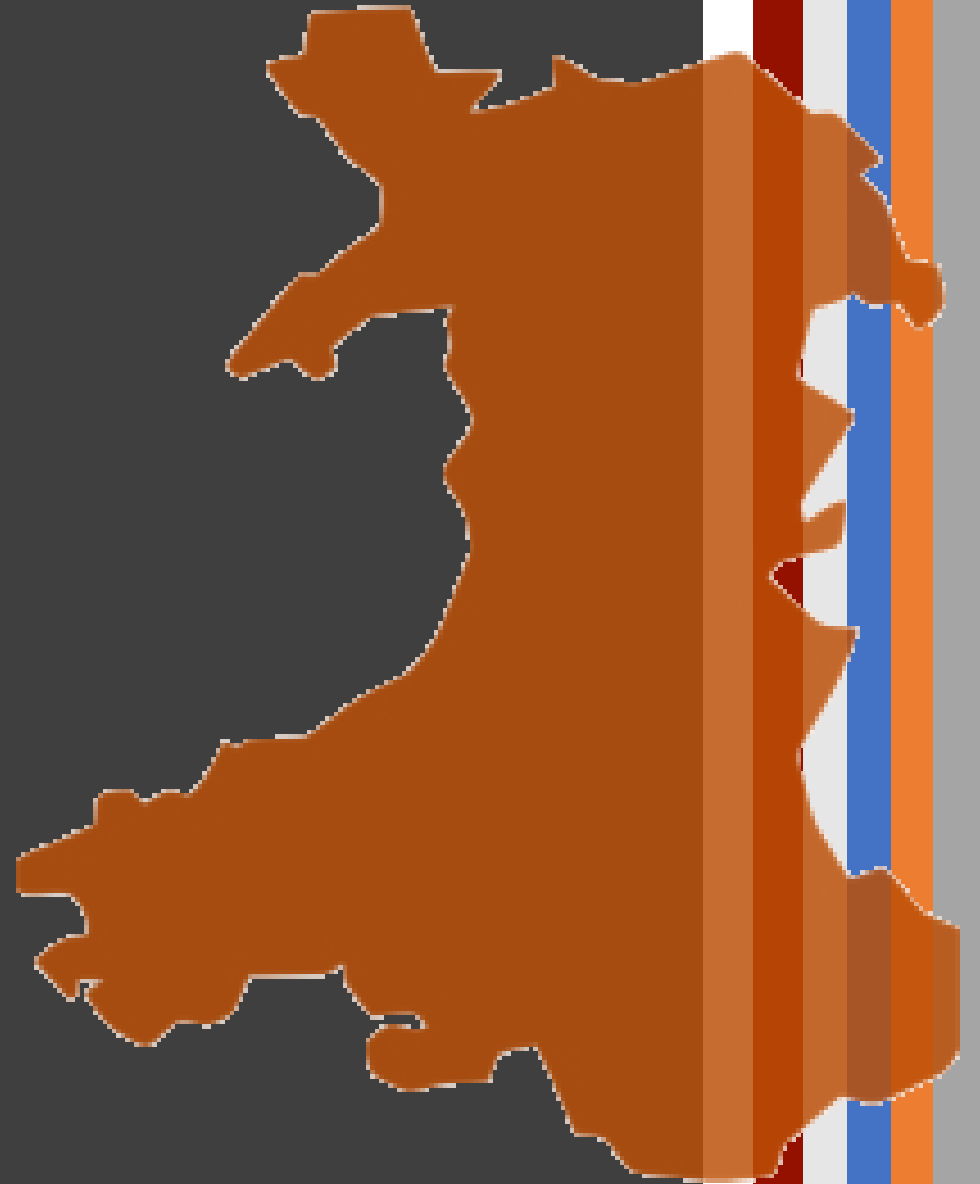
Validation of new degree in primary education and BSL with start date September 2024, University of Edinburgh

Scottish Deaf Teachers Group: further talks with GTCS

BSL Glossary led by Dr Audrey Cameron expanding rapidly: curriculum support

Existing BSL unit qualifications can become Nat 5 and Higher when more qualified teachers

# The Welsh approach



## A BSL Act for Wales?

- Campaign for a BSL Act in Wales since 1999
- Deffo!, deaf youth forum, submitted petition to Senedd in 2019 to improve access to education and services – successfully received, but no further action taken
- Motion NDM7478 by Mark Isherwood MS – Senedd passed in February 2021; not picked up through Private Members Bill ballot
- Motion NDM8093 by Mark Isherwood MS – Senedd passed December 2022
  - Includes a BSL Commissioner, and aims to improve access to education in BSL
- Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice - waiting for British Deaf Association to complete BSL audit then will ask Disability Rights Taskforce to look at recommendations which are likely to include BSL Act for Wales

# Curriculum for Wales

- To be introduced in school classrooms from nursery to Year 7 in 2022, Year 8 in 2023, Year 9 in 2024, Year 10 in 2025 and Year 11 in 2026
- Four Purposes that guide whole curriculum
- Six Areas of Learning and Experience
- Affords more flexibility and autonomy to teachers and schools
- A co-constructed curriculum
- English and Welsh
- **International languages include BSL**
  - A translinguaging approach to learning languages
- **BSL Glossary Group**
  - Focus groups, feedback, involvement of SSC

Easy Read

ADDYSG CYMRU  
EDUCATION WALES



## A new curriculum in Wales

Changing the way children and young people learn in school



This document was written by Welsh Government. It is an easy read version of 'The Curriculum for Wales: Guidance on Curriculum Design and Implementation'.

January 2020

# What's next for Wales?

Publication of BDA BSL Audit  
due in January 2023

New BSL Policy Manager, Suki  
Wescott

Disability Taskforce to consider  
audit findings and put forward  
recommendations to Welsh  
Government

- Need to ensure Deaf/BSL  
representation

Work underway to develop  
resources (Curriculum for  
Wales team, BSL Glossary,  
DCAL)

Need to address shortage of  
BSL teachers with QTS (EWC)

Courses needed:  
BSL at all levels (inc early  
years); language pedagogy;  
initial teacher education; ToDs

# The Phase 2 report



# Literature review

Deaf education

Language planning

Language  
acquisition

Bilingual education

Translanguaging,  
immersion  
education and  
transliteracy

Language attitudes  
in deaf education



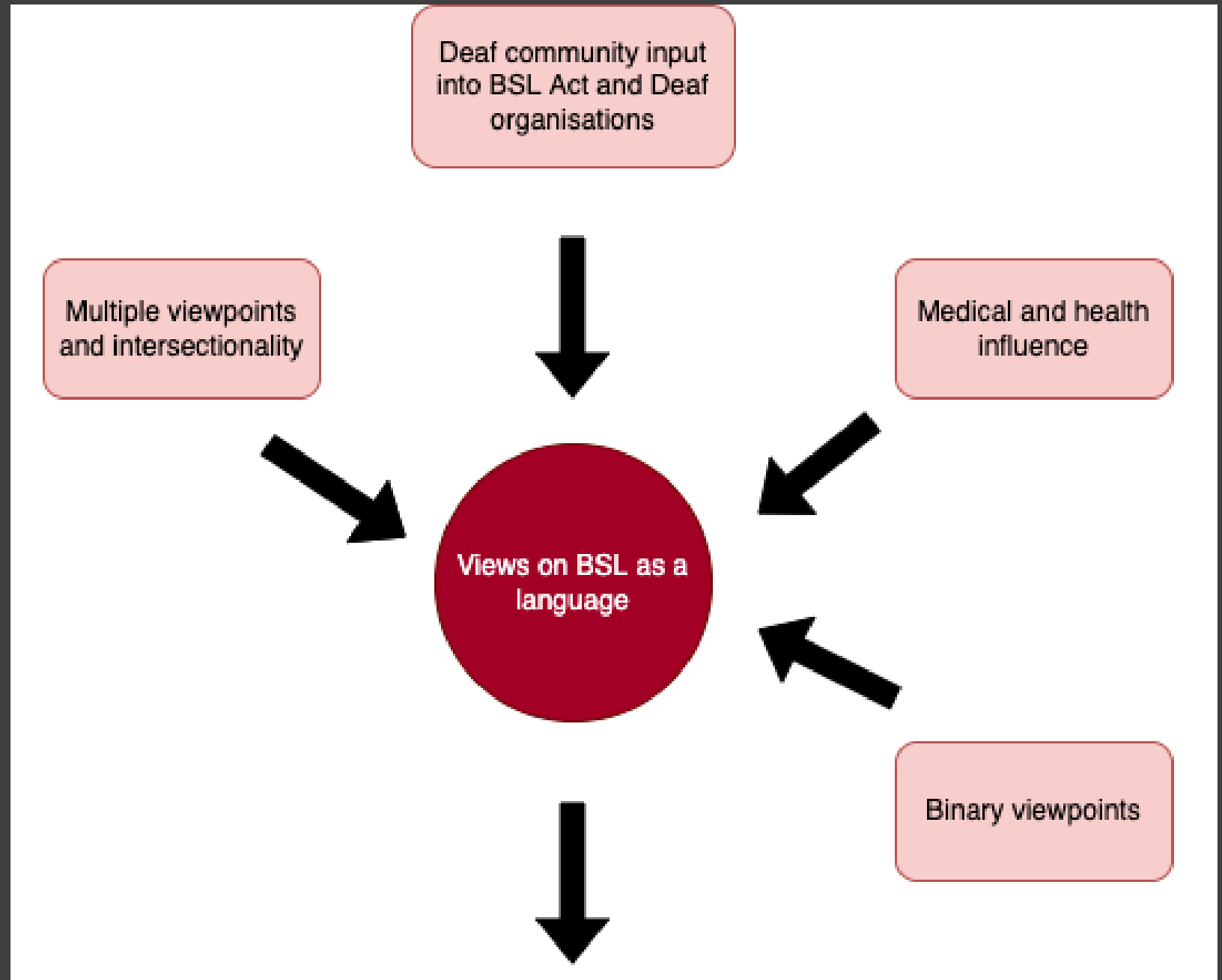
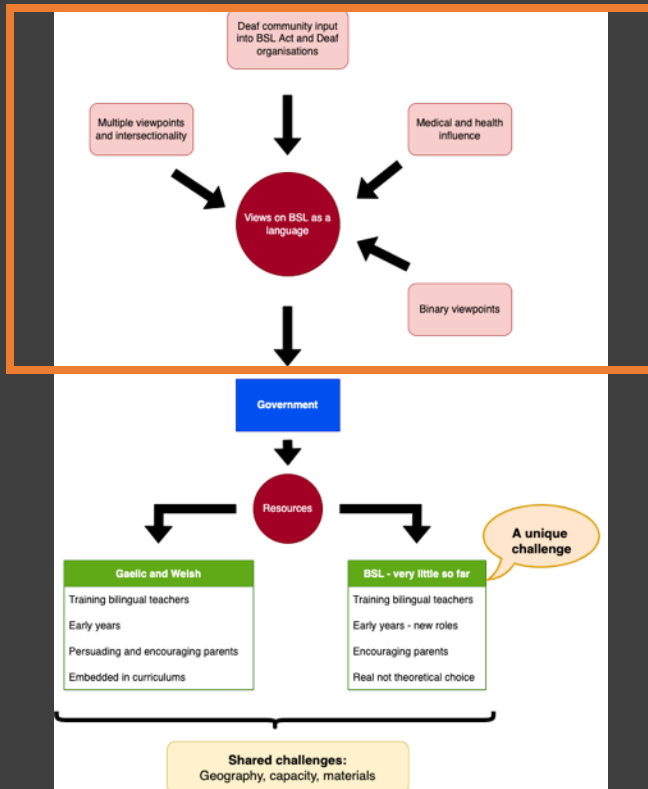
# Interviews

Stakeholder category	Number of interviews	
	Scotland	Wales
Civil servants	1	1
Colleges and universities	1	1
Local authorities	2	
National public bodies	3*	
Teachers of the Deaf	2	2
Third sector organisations	2 <sup>†</sup>	4 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>

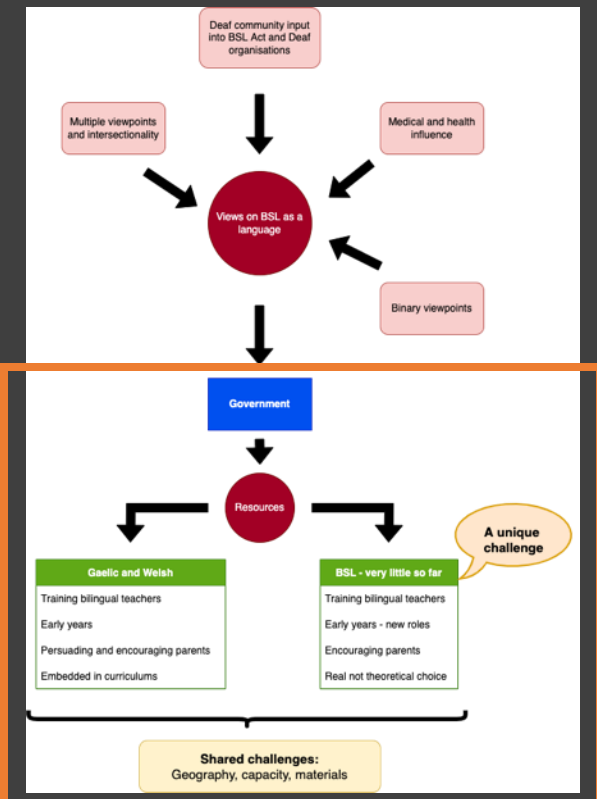
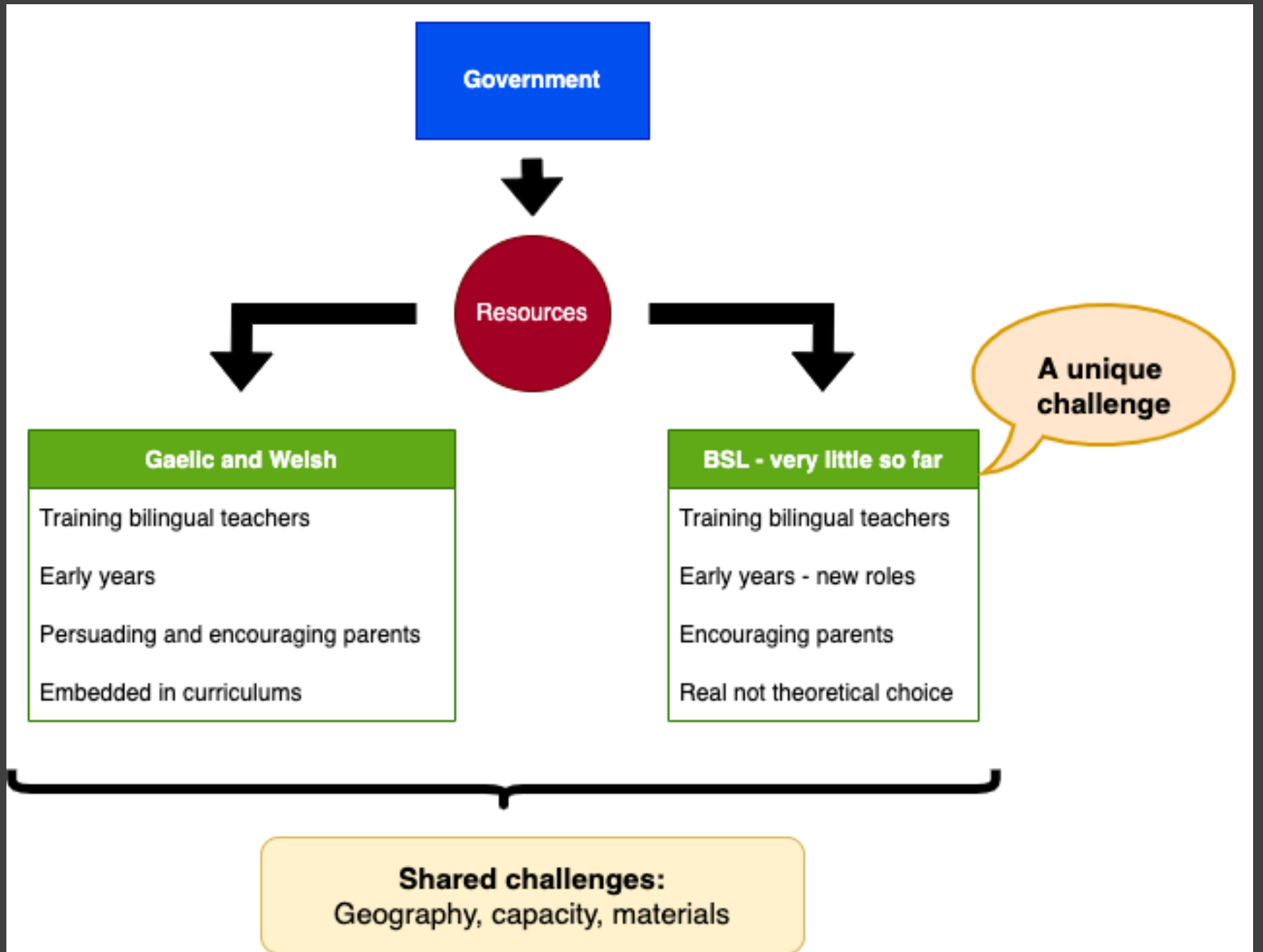
\* One of these interviews had two individuals representing one national public body

† One of these interviews involved three representatives in one organisation covering Scotland and Wales between them

# Theme map



# Theme map



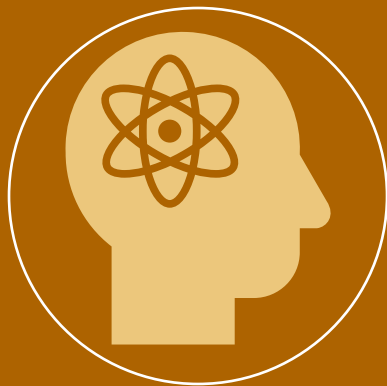
# Findings



Influence of  
medical  
intervention



Resources  
(curriculum  
development  
and staffing)



Need for more  
training in  
language  
pedagogy and  
how it relates to  
deaf children



Example of  
Welsh and Gaelic  
language  
education



Gaps in early  
years education  
for deaf children





# The research question



How does the approach of the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales to language planning support the promotion and encouragement of BSL in deaf education?

## Sub-questions



- What approach(es) do Scotland and Wales take to language planning? **Varied and successful in relation to Welsh and Gaelic**
- How do key stakeholders in Scotland and Wales conceptualise BSL in terms of *deaf-disabled* and *language-minority* rights? **Little confidence in bilingualism from ToDs**
- To what extent does the *deaf-disabled* paradigm persist in Scotland and Wales in the context of deaf education? **This viewpoint is dominant.**
- What role do national bodies, local authorities and parents of deaf children have in relation to deaf children's use of BSL and bilingual potential? **Strategic role – not being used yet in deaf educational settings.**

# Recommendations: early years



**Training for health professionals**

- Early support vital for deaf children
- Importance of language acquisition in early years
- For midwives to health visitors, newborn hearing screening, ENT consultants, audiology departments
- Twf/Cymraeg i Blant model



**Upskilling for nursery care workers**

- Funding for some nursery care workers to learn fluent BSL
- Cymraeg i Blant/Mudiad Meithrin model
- BSL-medium nurseries?



**BSL therapists**

- Develop new profession
- Central and peripatetic services
- BSL teachers

# Recommendations: resources



## Mapping exercise

- Need to identify and map qualifications and skills gap amongst people teaching BSL (ABSLTA survey)
- Establish numbers of BSL teachers in Wales and Scotland
- Gain qualified teacher status and accredit tutors to work in schools



## Welsh-Scottish approach to upskilling

- BSL degrees
- Work in partnership with ToD qualification provider to provide more opportunities for (language) teachers in Wales to qualify as ToDs
- Accredited/set up PGCE course in Wales for BSL teachers
- ToD course in Wales



## Language sabbaticals

- Common for Welsh- and Gaelic-medium teachers
- Never heard of in deaf education
- Raise standards for teaching through BSL for deaf children





Betting on deaf children's futures: how far are the Scottish and Welsh Governments ensuring the inclusion of BSL in deaf education?

# References

CRIDE (2021) <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/being-deaf-friendly/information-for-professionals/research-and-data/consortium-for-research-into-deaf-education-cride-reports/>

De Meulder, M., Murray, J. and McKee, R. (2019) *The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages: Advocacy and Outcomes Around the World*. Multilingual Matters.

O'Neill, R. & Wilks, R. (2021) The impact of the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 on deaf education. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/deafeducation/publications/>

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. Sage Publications.

Snelson, S.L. (2016). Qualitative and Mixed Methods Social Media Research: A Review of the Literature. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915624574>.

Wilks, R. (2020) *Making Equality Law Work for Deaf People*. University of Leicester. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350048406\\_Making\\_equality\\_law\\_work\\_for\\_Deaf\\_people](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350048406_Making_equality_law_work_for_Deaf_people)

Wilks, R. & O'Neill, R. (2022) Deaf Education in Scotland and Wales: Attitudes to British Sign Language in deaf education compared to Gaelic and Welsh. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/deafeducation/publications/>

## Contact



**Rachel O'Neill**

Email: [Rachel.oneill@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Rachel.oneill@ed.ac.uk)



**Rob Wilks**

Email: [wilksr2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:wilksr2@cardiff.ac.uk)