

# Deaf Education and the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015: comparisons with the Welsh approach

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# Introduction

## Phase 1

- Documentary analysis
- Report published 6 November 2021
- 14 recommendations including:
  - public debate regarding language acquisition and binary attitudes
  - engagement with families of deaf children and young deaf people
  - transparency re funding of third sector organisations
  - increase in availability of BSL courses
  - improvement in providing BSL content on websites

### The impact of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 on deaf education

This report has been produced to contribute to the review of the first national BSL plan (National Plan), due October 2021, and to act as a discussion point for parents, teachers, organisations and deaf young people themselves about what changes the Act has so far made in relation to their education.

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## Phase 2

- Themes identified in Phase 1 that required further examination:
  - The conceptualisation of BSL as a language
  - The extent to which binary attitudes towards deaf children as being either 'BSL pupils,' 'other deaf children' and/or disabled persist
  - Internal and external factors in the production of the first BSL plans
  - The role of the third sector and how they are funded
- **Desktop study:** Welsh element
- **Qualitative interviews:** 18 interviews with 21 stakeholders in Wales and Scotland in government, national public bodies, local authorities, schools, colleges and universities and third sector

# 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

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

# 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 generally?
- How do Scotland and Wales deliver their devolved powers in relation to education, and to deaf education in particular?
- What bilingual potential exists in both nations in relation to BSL?
- 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?
- How do stakeholders perceive the role of the national bodies, local authorities, parents, colleges, universities, parents of deaf children and the voluntary sector in relation to deaf children's use of BSL and bilingual potential?

# Methodology

- Qualitative content analysis, coding frame (Schreier, 2012; Snelson, 2016) in Nvivo (Wiltshier, 2011)
- Developed a number of initial nodes based on themes identified in Phase 1, and expanded based on interview responses
- Top counts were →
- Initial findings; need to do more in-depth analysis with data

| Node                             | Number of counts |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Language planning*               | 15               |
| Bi-, multi- and plurilingualism* | 14               |
| Resources                        | 13               |
| Language attitudes*              | 12               |
| BSL in schools                   | 11               |
| BSL Scotland Act*                | 10               |
| International languages          | 10               |

\* Relate to questions asked; first two questions were about language policy and bilingualism/multilingualism

# BSL Act 2022

- Came into force 28 June 2022
- Recognises BSL as language of England, Wales and Scotland (s1(1))
- Northern Ireland expressly not covered as language is devolved matter and Irish Sign Language is also used in Northern Ireland but not covered in Act
- Requires SoS for DWP to prepare and publish a BSL report by 30 April 2023 (ss2(1), 2(7)(a)) and subsequently every 3 years (s2(7)(b))
- SoS has duties to promote and facilitate use of BSL (s1(3)), with each government department also required to do so in communications with public (s2(2))
- Guidance must be issued with regard to that promotion or facilitation (s3(1))
- DWP intends to establish non-statutory board, 'BSL Council' (House of Commons, 2022)

# BSL (Scotland) Act 2015

- Aims to promote use and understanding of BSL
- Requires the Scottish executive to prepare and publish a national plan in relation to BSL, which is expected to set out Scottish Government's BSL strategy
- Requires public authorities, defined as 'any body or office-holder (other than Scottish Ministers themselves) which is Scottish public authority with mixed functions or no reserved functions'
  - 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

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

Scottish Government  
British Sign Language (BSL)  
**National Plan**  
2017-2023

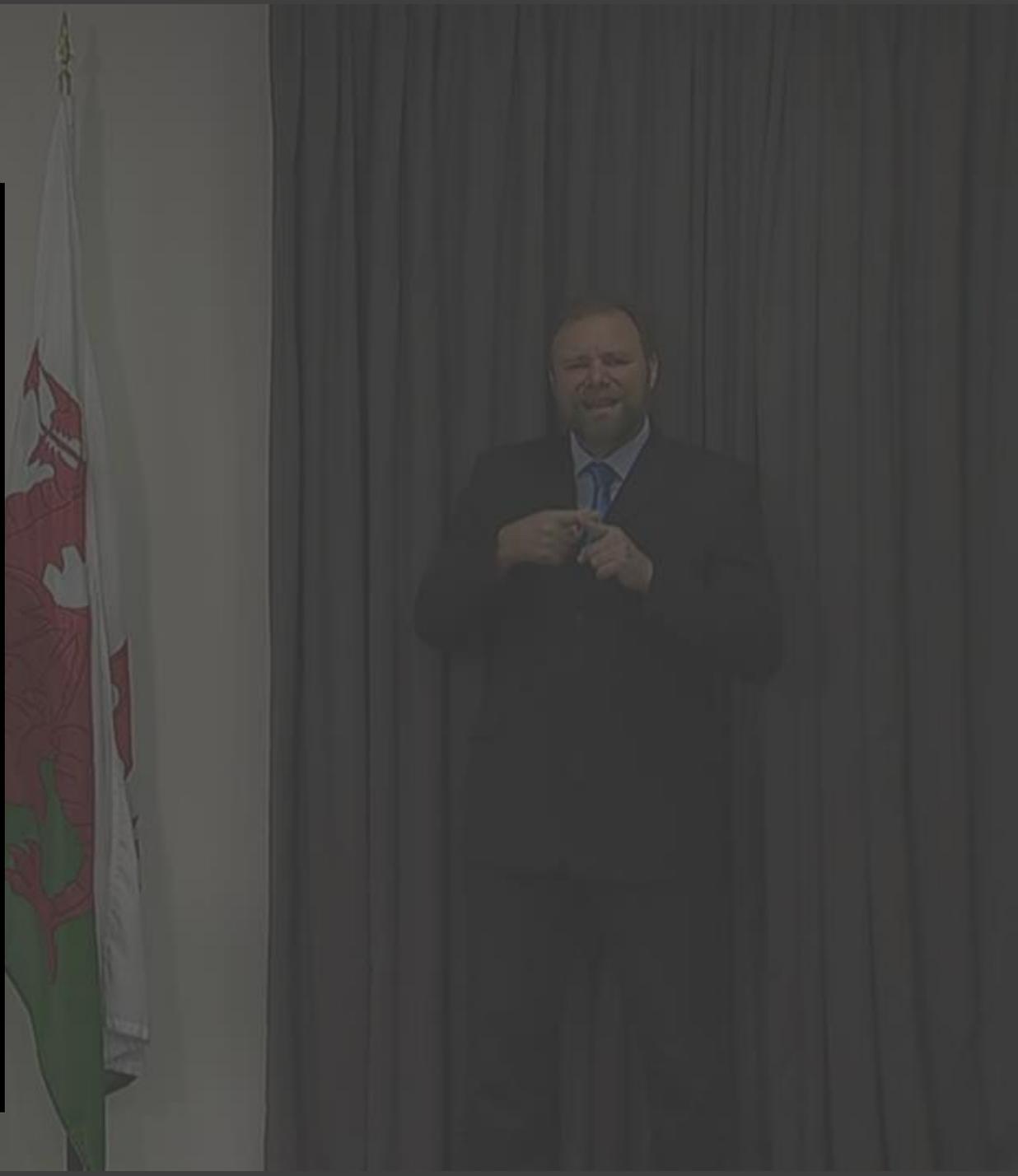


# National BSL Plan

- Current plan 2017-2023
- Goals related to deaf education
  - Early Family resources in BSL: **Councils** (Goals 11-15)
  - **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
  - 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).

# A BSL Act for Wales?

- Campaign for a BSL Act in Wales since 1999
- Welsh Government formally recognised BSL in January 2004 – symbolic gesture with no legal weight
- Calls for a BSL GCSE (2017)
- 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 debated and passed motion for legislative proposal to encourage BSL in Wales in February 2021
  - Now needs to be picked in ballot (Private Members Bill)
- 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



# Comparing the education systems of Scotland and Wales

- Key principle in Scotland is the presumption of mainstreaming, i.e. fewer special schools and children generally attend local schools
- This does not apply to Gaelic Medium Education. Parents can request placement in Gaelic Medium Schools outside their local authority
- Key principle in Wales is bilingualism in English and Welsh. All children learn Welsh.
- Parents can choose Welsh-medium school or English medium where all children learn Welsh
- Percentage of ToDs qualified, in training, and unqualified
  - **Scotland:** ToDs (132 Full Time Equivalents). 68% trained, 27% in training, 5% untrained
  - **Wales:** ToDs (60 FTE). 91% trained, 7% in training, 2% untrained (CRIDE 2021)
- Resource base schools (deaf peer group possible)
  - **Scotland:** 14 resource bases, 3 small schools for deaf children
  - **Wales:** 20 resource bases
- Relevant public bodies: Care Inspectorate/Social Care Wales; Qualifications Wales/Scottish Qualifications Authority; Education Workforce Council/General Teaching Council of Scotland; Education Scotland

# National Curriculums

## 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, could include BSL

## 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 multilingual approach to learning languages?

# Literature review

Deaf education

Language planning

Language  
acquisition

Bilingual education

Translanguaging,  
immersion  
education and  
transliteracy

Language attitudes  
in deaf education

The role of the  
third sector

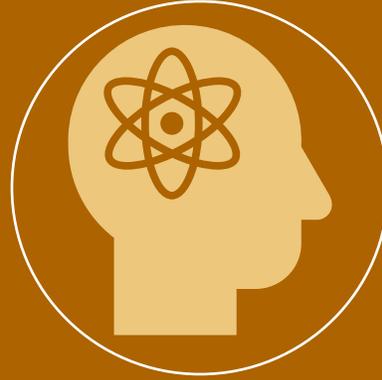
# Initial Findings



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



# Recommendations: early years



## Training for health professionals

- Early intervention 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

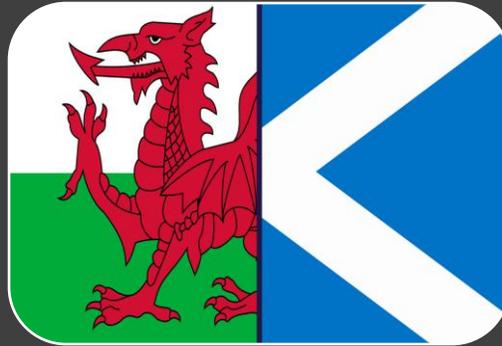
- Develop new profession
- Central and peripatetic services
- BSL teachers

# Recommendations: resources



## Mapping exercise

- Need to identify and map qualifications and skills gap amongst people teaching BSL
- 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

- Welsh Government funds places for 4 students per year to do UG degree or PGCE at Edinburgh
- Work in partnership with ToD qualification provider to provide more opportunities for (language) teachers in Wales to qualify as ToDs
- Accredit/set up PGCE/PGDE courses 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

## Contact



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