

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 27

Ymateb gan : Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Plant Byddar Cymru (NDCS)

Response from : National Deaf Children's Society Cymru (NDCS)

About Us

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is a national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We represent and campaign for the rights of all deaf children and young people from birth until they reach independence.

Deaf children and young people in Wales face many barriers preventing them from reaching their full potential. Welsh Government statistics demonstrate significant attainment gaps between deaf pupils and their peers at every Key Stage.¹ Deafness is not a learning disability and, with appropriate support, deaf learners should achieve on a par with their hearing peers.

Response

NDCS Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We have enjoyed working with the Children Young People and Education Committee in the previous assembly term and hope to continue working with the committee in the new term. NDCS Cymru is particularly keen to work with the Committee in relation to the points below.

Additional Learning Needs Reforms

We are conscious that the new Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Bill will soon be progressing through the legislative process. Welsh Government statistics demonstrate significant attainment gaps between deaf learners and their peers, so it is clear that too many deaf learners are not accessing the support they need to reach their full potential. As such, it is imperative that the new ALN system works for deaf learners.

While we welcome many aspects of the new Bill, we also have major concerns. Through our membership on TSANA (Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance), we gave evidence to the previous Committee and also participated in a roundtable event to outline our concerns on the Bill. We

¹ For more information, see http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/index.html

were pleased to see that the Committee's letter to the then-Education Minister endorsed many of our key concerns.

In particular, NDCS Cymru is keen to ensure that the following points are addressed:

- Historically, frontline staff have demonstrated a lack of awareness that hearing impairment constitutes an additional learning need. It is, therefore, important to ensure that the Code of Practice clearly outlines the eligibility of deaf learners for an IDP. This includes all children with a permanent hearing loss of any level and those who have a temporary hearing loss for longer than 3 months (where grommets are not fitted). Glue ear can persist for years and, without appropriate support, temporary deafness can have a significant impact on a child's learning during this time.
- It is essential that there is national statutory template for an IDP, which clearly encapsulates core information regarding the learner's needs and the support to which they are entitled. Without a statutory template, the system will lack transparency, legal accountability and portability.
- Under the reformed system, schools will be responsible for co-ordinating the IDP process. It is important that a lack of awareness among school staff does not become a barrier to deaf children accessing specialists like teachers of the deaf. We therefore recommend that the Code of Practice explicitly states that teachers of the deaf must be included in an assessment of a deaf child. In addition, we would urge that co-ordination of IDPs for those with low incidence needs be reserved for local authorities. The availability of disability specific provision pathways would also help to ensure that assessments across Wales include the relevant specialists.
- The current proposals lack detail on how the system will operate within the early years and post-16 context. If appropriate detail is not provided in the next draft, we run the risk of IDPs being under-used in these contexts, to the detriment of vulnerable learners.
- We are disappointed that the new Bill does not cover apprenticeships.
- If the new system is to operate effectively, it will be imperative that school staff receive training on the IDP process, person centred planning, and disability (including deaf) awareness training.
- We are keen to see a clear commitment for the Estyn inspection framework to cover IDPs and help ensure that the system operates effectively.
- A much stronger duty on health is required to secure appropriate involvement of key health professionals in the process.

- More detail is required on the advocacy and dispute resolution services. It is important for consistency and transparency that such standards operate to minimum national guidelines.

Curriculum Review and Teacher Training

NDCS Cymru is keen to work with the Welsh Government and the Committee as the Curriculum and teacher training reviews progress. In particular, we are keen to ensure that:

- Robust systems for collecting data on the numbers and attainment of specific disability groups are retained. This data is imperative in planning for and monitoring the support available to vulnerable groups of learners.
- Teacher Training includes basic deaf awareness. 80% of all children will experience temporary hearing loss. Without appropriate support and communication awareness, these children can become isolated in a classroom environment.
- Pioneer schools are supported to expand their knowledge and understanding of low incidence needs as they develop and test the new curriculum.

Workforce Planning

Last year, the Welsh Government published a report on [Workforce Planning of Special Educational Needs \(SEN\)](#). The report highlighted difficulties in the aging profile of teachers of the deaf in Wales, indicating that in the next ten years around half (30 out of 63) will reach the traditional retirement age. NDCS Cymru is keen to work with the Welsh Government and Assembly to address this issue.

Opportunities to learn BSL

Every year, NDCS appoints a Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The young deaf people on the board discuss barriers that are pertinent to them and choose a key issue which they would like to focus on. This year, the YAB has chosen to focus on the need for improved opportunities to learn British Sign Language (BSL).

In January 2004, BSL was recognised as an official language in Wales. However, there remain difficulties in accessing opportunities to learn BSL. Improved opportunities to learn BSL would:

- Help families with young deaf children in establishing early communication techniques with their child.
- Assist deaf young people who use BSL as their first language who often feel socially isolated.
- Deaf young people who have an oral approach to language and are effective lip-readers (including both of our Wales YAB members) have

also identified a desire to learn BSL. Some have said that using BSL alongside lip-reading would be helpful to them, while others acknowledge a desire to learn BSL in order to link in with culturally deaf communities.

Our Wales YAB members, and, wanted to take this opportunity to ask the Committee to consider access to learning BSL. They asked us to submit the messages below as part of the NDCS Cymru response to the consultation.

Hi my name is and I am currently on the NDCS Youth Advisory Board. We are currently campaigning for more opportunities for everyone to learn BSL. I was not given the opportunity to learn BSL as I have speech, but feel I would have really benefitted from learning sign language from an early age. However, I really believe that it would make a difference to communication with so many more deaf people who rely on sign language for communication if BSL was offered in schools. It would then serve not only deaf children but would be a lifelong skill which could be used in adulthood. I would therefore really appreciate if CYPE could look at introducing BSL into Welsh schools as an option as soon as possible.
Thank you,

My name is, I'm 17 years old and I live in North Wales near Snowdonia. I'm a member of the Youth Advisory Board with the National Deaf Children's Society. This means that I represent the rights and try to make things easier for deaf young people here in the UK.

Over the past few months, the Youth Advisory Board members have met twice- once in Birmingham and once in Leeds. We agreed that more needs to be done about British Sign Language. We realised that not a lot of people actually know BSL, and therefore this limits a deaf person's communication, meaning they are unable to take part in activities. For example, when taking part in water activities, a deaf person will need to take their hearing aids or cochlear implants out and therefore will not be able to hear instructions. I remember one experience when I was in a kayak, and the instructor was shouting at me to do something and I was crying because I didn't know what he was saying as I had my hearing aids out. If he had used BSL instead, then I definitely wouldn't have cried!

Everybody should be made to feel accepted, regardless of disability. Certainly, deafness should not put anybody at a disadvantage. Everybody is equal in this world. Therefore, as a group, we have arrived at a lot of ideas of ways to improve the use of BSL for deaf people or those with additional needs. These included deaf pupils in schools to teach BSL at lunchtimes in school or fingerspellathon competitions. We also strongly agreed that all Communication Support Workers in Wales need to have a minimum level of BSL to help deaf young people at different levels of hearing loss. It would be VERY beneficial if school teachers even went out of the way just to learn the alphabet in BSL in order to support communication in the classrooms. By

looking back at my school years, if teachers even knew the alphabet and used it whilst talking, it would have a dramatic effect on my performance. When I was learning the introduction of BSL last year, there was a group of school teachers learning BSL just because there was a deaf boy in their class that they were teaching. I thought this was very inspiring and so kind of them to learn BSL just for this little boy. But I also thought- why won't my teachers learn BSL? Why won't all teachers in Wales learn it? It would definitely help me as it would make school lessons more clear for me and I would feel more accepted. Teachers should be made to realise that deafness is just not the fact that the pupil cannot hear- they are put at a disadvantage compared to hearing students. By struggling to hear what is being said, a deaf person will become tired, become very unconfident and will fall behind. This will have an effect on their life. It is very true to say that people don't truly value their hearing until it's taken away from them. And that's what I want people to know. When your hearing is taken away from you, life can become more hard.

I would like the CYPE to try and look into bringing or offering BSL as a subject in school. There are many deaf/hard of hearing people in this country, so BSL would be advantageous and helpful. After speaking to my school friends, they said they would have liked to learn BSL. I just hope that in the future, more people will know BSL and that deaf people will be able to communicate with more hearing people. But we need to do something about it now!