

National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families



April 2020

Response by the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

About Us

The National Deaf Children's Society is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

We support deaf children and young people with all levels of hearing loss from mild to profound, including those with a unilateral loss (hearing loss in one ear) and temporary hearing loss.

Our Response

Language is an essential means of people connecting with, exploring, and embracing their cultural identity. Deaf young people in Wales may embrace and inhabit many cultural identities: they may identify as culturally deaf and part of the Deaf community, they may use sign language, they may come from families from elsewhere in the world complete with their own rich cultures and language who now call Wales their home (indeed there is an increased incidence of deafness among ethnic minority groups), and they may identify as Welsh and/or Welsh language users. It is important that any policy and approach undertaken by the Welsh Government is fully inclusive so that deaf children and young people are granted the same opportunity to explore, build upon and own their Welsh identity through language acquisition as their hearing peers.

Having read the *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*¹ consultation, we would like to offer the following feedback.

1) Please ensure policy and approaches are suitable to the needs of deaf children and British Sign Language (BSL) speaking children and families

The consultation asserts the importance for all households to be able to speak Welsh with their children.

¹ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

Maintaining and increasing the numbers of Welsh speakers is important, but ensuring the language is used is vital. It is essential that all Welsh speakers, in whatever type of household they live, feel that they have the opportunity to transmit Welsh to their children.²

This national campaign should be inclusive of deaf families, both where parents are deaf and/or the children are deaf..We would welcome the opportunity to see how the Welsh Government has planned to make the approach inclusive and would also be willing to feed into and provide any resources to help.

We'll provide practical advice and/or techniques to families where not everybody speaks Welsh on how to increase their use of Welsh in all sorts of family situations e.g. in the car, during mealtimes at home etc.³

It is important that these approaches are designed to include advice and techniques that meet the needs of children who have Additional Learning Needs (ALN). For families of deaf children, for example, 'in the car' learning may not be the most suitable approach, especially where children rely on lip-reading. It is important, therefore, that the guidance provides a variety of examples and options for learning so no child or family feels left out. You can read our tips and guidance for communicating with a deaf child here: <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/being-deaf-friendly/communicating-with-a-deaf-child/>

We'll analyse how we communicate with families about their use of Welsh to improve the impact of our current and future work in this area. This could involve looking at which channels we use and the way we use them, as well as the messaging from us and our stakeholders to parents/carers. But this is not only about us communicating with parents/carers—we will also explore opportunities for peer-to-peer support amongst parents/carers.⁴

Peer to peer support is an excellent and recognised means of sharing knowledge, skills and experience. Every parent's experience will differ, but, for those parents who have children with ALN, they may prefer opportunities to discuss and share their experiences with families who share similar needs to themselves. It is important, therefore, that a wide range and inclusive sample size of families with ALN are used in the testing, analysis and peer-to-peer support groups.

² Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.22. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

³ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.23. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

⁴ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.24. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

We'll give teaching practitioners the skills and learning resources to help them positively encourage children to speak Welsh with one another, with a view to increasing their use of Welsh within the family and wider community, now and in later life.⁵

It is important that any learning resources directed towards teaching practitioners include reference to how they can support children with ALN to increase their use of Welsh.

We are mindful of the Welsh Government's emphasis on cross-curricular learning. It is important to note that where learners, including many deaf learners, have accessibility requirements around learning a language, that these access requirements are met wherever and whenever language is taught.

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru would also like to take this opportunity to highlight that there are issues in areas of Wales with accessing specialist ALN support, such as Teachers of the Deaf, through the medium of Welsh. As such, there are families of deaf children who do not feel able to choose to educate their child in English/Welsh according to their preference – but rather according to the availability of specialist support in each medium. We would urge the Welsh Government to look into this issue as part of this initiative.

We'll use all the possibilities the workplace offers for reigniting people's use of Welsh and explore what potential there is for increased Welsh language use in the workplace to 'spill over' into families.⁶

Whilst the workplace provides a utilisable space for people to explore and practise their Welsh language skills, without proper attention to ensuring these approaches include all colleagues, the scheme could act as a form of alienation. Research shows that 7 out of 10 D/deaf workers feel that colleagues do not communicate effectively with them⁷. Any workplace focussed approach must be presented in such a way that all members of the workforce can participate. Action on Hearing Loss have produced documentation on how workplaces can be safe and inclusive spaces for all the workforce. You can find it here <https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/how-we-help/businesses-and-employers/employer-hub/supporting-employees-with-hearing-loss/>.

We'll develop an online presence to assist parents/carers who could, but for whatever reason, don't speak Welsh with their children. This may involve helping parents who have no personal experience of raising a child bilingually to do so (e.g. helping them learn child-directed speech in Welsh).⁸

⁵ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.27. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

⁶ IBID

⁷ Action on Hearing Loss, *Employers Guide*. Available at: <https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/how-we-help/businesses-and-employers/employer-hub/supporting-employees-with-hearing-loss/>

⁸ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.24. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

It is essential that these videos are deaf friendly and accessible, through the use of subtitles and BSL.

2) Technology- Support Local Authorities to provide Radio Aids in the Home setting

*We will explore the opportunities technology offers to help children play in Welsh and how that in turn can provide opportunities to help more use of Welsh in the household.*⁹

For many children, technology, such as radio aids, are essential tools for both their communication and linguistic development. Many families across Wales will not be able to fully communicate with their child and support their speech, language and communication needs without access to this essential technology. At the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru, we strongly support the need for all families to have access to essential assistive technology in the home setting.

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru is aware of a current postcode lottery in relation to access to equipment such as a radio aid in the home setting. We have been calling for such provision to be regarded as an essential part of local authority support for deaf children. This initiative further emphasises the need for this provision to be made available.

3) Please ensure families with ALN and/ or deafness are included in the research and evaluation process.

*When we commission research projects on the use of Welsh in families, we'll make sure we consider the role of parents/carers, their wider family networks on the use of Welsh, and what part children themselves play. This will include considering Welsh language transmission from a child's perspective.*¹⁰

It is important that the views, insight and input of children with ALN are included in the research and evaluation process.

*When we commission research projects on the use of Welsh in families, we'll study children's language development in the context of Welsh-English bilingualism in the home (including how they acquire grammar, vocabulary and phonology) among children living in households with at least one adult Welsh speaker. We'll use what we find to improve our work.*¹¹

As above, we ask that families with deaf children and ALN experience are included in this work.

⁹ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.25. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

¹⁰ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.25. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

¹¹ Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.26. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to highlight a sentiment within the consultation that strongly stood out to us.

Children are individuals and have their own sense of agency. They aren't just passive recipients of a language from parents/carers. Children may express language preferences themselves regarding what language they use and influence which language their parents/carers use with them, and on what language they use with their siblings and their friends.¹²

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru believe that all children should be supported to express themselves through a language that they feel comfortable and confident with and one that best meets their needs and identity. As Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states, children from minority groups have:

the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.¹³

For parents of deaf children who would like to use is British Sign Language (BSL), a severe shortage and lack of access to BSL classes are preventing them from being able to communicate with their child. The recently published *Independent Review of BSL Provision for Adults in Wales* highlights how a lack of availability and cost is preventing parents from accessing classes¹⁴. For those who do manage to undertake classes, the content is often irrelevant to the specific communication needs of families and children. We believe that the Welsh Government should support parents to access BSL classes that are targeted to the communication needs of children. This approach would work in harmony and conjunction with Welsh Government work to improve language transmission in households.

More information

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. For further information please contact us at campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk

¹² Welsh Government, *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families*, p.21. Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/national-policy-on-welsh-language-transmission-and-use-in-families-consultation-document_0.pdf

¹³United Nations, 'Article 30', *The rights of every child: A summary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org.uk/child-rights-partners/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/08/CRC_summary_leaflet_Child_Rights_Partners_web_final.pdf

¹⁴ Bowen, R, Holtom D, (2020). *Independent Review of BSL Provision for Adults in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 4/2020. Available at: <https://gov.wales/independent-review-british-sign-language-bsl-provisionadults-wales>