

**P-04-526 Please make Senedd TV accessible to deaf people –
Correspondence from Petitioner to Committee, 08.01.13.**

Kayleigh Driscoll

Dirprwy Clerc y Pwyllgor DeisebauPetitions

Committee Deputy Clerk

RE petition by Mervyn James

"We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to provide subtitling and signed language access to televised debates and proceedings, to enable the 300,000 with hearing loss and deafness in Wales to follow the democratic processes hearing people already enjoy."

To the members of the petition committee.

When I first informed my deaf peers, that I was setting up a petition for access to televised Assembly proceedings, their first response was derision. Most said "Surely there are more important petitions you could set up for us, than accessing a boring political session on a TV ? what for ?"

I explained that the welsh assembly makes major decisions on what affects deaf welsh and hard of hearing lives, much more now we have a devolved administration. The next response was "What does the Assembly do anyway ? Everything comes from Westminster not Wales, what does an 'assembly' do ? is it about Welsh speakers? we can't do that..." I tried to explain that was my primary reason for asking for access to what goes on at the Assembly, to raise awareness of what the Assembly is, and what it does, and television being a visual medium, is a prime area of raising that awareness. Many of my peers never vote, don't know what the Assembly does, we never see politicians at our deaf clubs or anywhere else, and when it comes to voting, we never get told who stands for what, or why they stand, we are almost completely divorced from the democratic voting process.

I based my petition on initially seeing 'Parliament TV' on the BBC, which aired welsh assembly issues, only then did I know, Senedd TV existed. It very rapidly became clear both were pointless in respect to our area of disability, as there wasn't any medium of viable access to either. The Assembly website was riddled with confusions and didn't work with different systems deaf used online. The site is not accessible really, and riddled with sensory impairment comments that cover different areas we want information on, we just cannot locate what we need, and search options and terms made using the site pretty pointless, and very difficult to negotiate. There appeared no distinction between the deaf culture, and deaf as a medical term, or options on accessing formats. I just feel we are no part of what goes on.

I fully understand the cost issues, but it is costing the assembly nothing, because we get nothing. I believe that isn't the right way to go. I think it would be useful for the assembly to adopt as soon as possible, televised/subtitled access to the cross party committees and areas e.g. that deal directly with our issues, be they health or

whatever vital areas of our lives. I believe Senedd TV can do that, for a starting point, albeit the camera work would need to be changed so that faces can be seen better. I have read since some suggestion of access might occur, I don't deal really with maybe's and prefer a time scale. One Senedd program showed a chair leg for 7 minutes..... there seems an half-hearted attempt to use the media properly. Subtitling is very easy a service to provide, in an amateur way via youtube, I can do this myself quite easily, it should be well within the Assembly's expertise to do it. However **do NOT rely on google captions** to interpret the spoken word for us, it does not work ! So posting to youtube is not access unless in-vision captions are already on them.

With regards to the televised proceedings via the BBC, I think the welsh assembly can make it clear, coverage of the Assembly should conform with our access needs, at present there is some arbitrary 'minimum viewer base requirement' stated by Ofcom/BBC and supported by AOHL, that excludes us, because they demanded 9 times the actual welsh deaf population as viewers, for access to happen. It also ignored a very basic fact, we could never BE viewers unless we had the access first. You don't get demand without access. As it is, we don't get consulted on major issues for the same reason. This unfairly penalizes us because we cannot hear. I believe the Welsh Assembly can fight our corner, by telling the BBC it cannot cover proceedings outside Wales unless our access is there. This makes the Welsh Assembly complicit in discriminating against our access, to the democratic process, and especially if the Assembly e.g. was taking a fee from the BBC. Support for our access will be seen by deaf and HI in wales as very real support. I do not believe it unreasonable to ask for selective coverage of areas that concern us direct as a start point. Unless I get others to check I have no idea who is saying what on my behalf either. It is a policy of the systems and the 'state' operating to our exclusion. Some of want to know what is going on, as averse to other deaf feeling, what is the point we don't have the access ?

We have I think, an inherent right to know what our Assembly is saying and doing on our behalf, and hope the committee can appreciate why this petition asks for the access it has done. At this point I am not asking for sign language access, as basically subtitling or captions is the most accessible format for deaf people, and will more effectively reach the majority of the 300,000 in Wales currently excluded.. At this point also, I am uncertain of dual language approaches. In mitigation, I think using the welsh language subtitling would only work if the Assembly did two subtitled versions of the same thing, which I think the Assembly would feel cost prohibitive.... Welsh language already gets support, we don't, and factually, no deaf people can speak or read welsh, their education does not include it.. I would urge committee members to support an access to Senedd TV on the basis of my petition.

Thank you

Mr Mervyn James (Profoundly deaf), Newport, Gwent.