



The voice for Youth Deaf Youth in Wales

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Dear Mr Rowlands,

**Subject: Response to the letter issued from the WLGA**

We were greatly disappointed having watched the most recent Petitions meeting that was held last week. We have watched all of the meetings that have taken place (we have had them translated them into BSL for us to access) discussing the petition submitted by Deffo! The petition was submitted back in 2015 by a group of young people, coming together as Deffo! keen to make a big difference to Deaf Children and Young People's experience in the Education system.

Since Deffo! was formed in 2006, we have had four meetings with the Minister for Education, two with Jayne Hutt and two with Jane Davidson. During the period since we have submitted the petition, there have been two elections, two different Ministers that have met with us and now a third in post, a lot of discussion and evidence gathering sessions from Deffo! and Alun Davies, and now a report from the WLGA. We now hope that the WLGA are able to move the actions forward.

Huw Lewis has made many responses (yet never met with us), whereas Alun Davies has met with us and parents here in Swansea and other locations, on two occasions. The Children's Commissioners' annual report also highlighted that Deaf children are being failed in education and has called on the Welsh Government to do something about it. The Children's Commissioner has met with a number of Deaf families to hear their concerns.

We are aware that there are capacity and funding issues and this is a constant battle that is faced by parents who want their children to receive a good educational service in BSL, but there are a lack of placements and not enough provision.

The letter from WLGA mentions BATOD and the National Deaf Childrens Society. Deffo! would like to know what the views of BATOD are on BSL being taught in schools, as many members / Teachers of Deaf Children only have a minimum of Level 1 BSL themselves. The NDCS are providing training sessions in Family Sign Language and it may be true that some vocabulary is different for babies and small children however, the parents need to be in advance of their children's language learning to be able to maintain, develop and also stretch their childrens communication and language development.

Talking Hands Charity, based in Swansea, is supporting their families and Deaf young people by helping to fund accredited BSL classes that are being run at the local Deaf centre. They have had a great number of parents, grand parents and young people taking up the offer of support and learning the language gaining recognised accreditation for their achievements. The Deaf Centre themselves have also tried to access funding streams to support families on low incomes / unemployed, to access financial aid to help fund these Nationally Accredited BSL Courses. One place on the course starts from £300 but the funding has been rejected as they have been told that money for adult education lies with lifelong learning? These parents and family members need the financial backing now to enable them, especially parents, to communicate more effectively with their own children.

It is positive that the WLGA are looking at this and they have even made the suggestion that the only way to resolve this is to establish a school dedicated to the education of Deaf Children. This, even if it happens is going to take time, so we would strongly urge the Minister for Education to put BSL on the National Curriculum for all children to learn it from primary age through to College. It would also be useful if Welsh Universities would follow in the footsteps of UCL London in accepting BSL as a modern foreign language, to raise awareness and encourage access to the language.

We agree with the need to implement a long term strategy to encourage Deaf people to come forward to train as teachers / tutors and would like to extend that further and encourage schools to employ Deaf people in roles that will provide mentoring and positive role modeling for Deaf children.

There are clubs for Deaf children young people and families, but support is needed to enable access to these, as transport is one of the biggest issues that prevents the open access of these clubs. Training is also required for the staff to develop their skills, to enable quality services to be delivered and maintained.

We welcome the WLGA's report which in a way sounds depressing but on the other hand raises the very real problematic issues that this petition is highlighting. Big organisations have their roles, but it is vital that the small clubs and groups *already offering support*, mentors and role models to the families also need to be recognised for the work and contribution that they are already doing.

We thank you for the opportunity to respond and look forward to the next Petitions Committee sitting to see where we go next .

On Behalf of Deffo!

Regards  
Cathie Robins - Talbot