

# MINUTES

## Cross-Party Group on Deaf Issues

Thursday 26 October 2023

12.00pm – 1.30pm

Meeting sponsored by Mark Isherwood MS

**Attendees:** Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)  
Rob Wilks (Secretary)  
Alison Bryan  
Hazel Badjie (NDCS)  
John Day (Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board)  
Julia Terry (Swansea University)  
Margaret Buchanan-Geddes  
Mark Davies  
Michelle Fowler (Velindre University NHS Trust)  
Polly Winn (RNID)  
Rebecca Mansell (BDA)  
Samantha Davies  
Sarah Thomas (COS)  
Stuart Parkinson  
Tom Lichy (BDA)  
Tony Evans

**Apologies:** Mike Hedges MS  
Heledd Fychan MS  
Cath Booth (Wales Council for Deaf People)  
Cathie Robins-Talbot  
Dawn Sommerlad (COS)  
Hannah Winters (Cardiff & Vale University Health Board)  
Martin Griffiths (BDA)  
Nigel Williams (South Wales Cochlear Implant Support Group)  
Robin Ash (BDA)

**BSL/English Interpreters:** James Bailey (SignLive)  
Christian Leyland (SignLive)

**Speech-to-Text Reporter:** Live captions

## **Speaker Series #1**

### **Sarah Thomas, Managing Director of Centre of Sign-Sight-Sound**

Please see attached slides.

In the Q&A session that followed after the presentation, Margaret Buchanan-Geddes asked if there was an age limit on COS' services as she felt that there were people in Blind Veterans who may appreciate our services. She also said that she hoped services such as theirs could spread into the rest of Wales. Ms Thomas confirmed that there was no age limit with regard to COS' services.

The Chair asked if Ms Thomas had any tips about how to secure funding in the current economic climate. Ms Thomas said that she had little to no experience of bid writing prior to taking over as MD of COS. However, utilising the services of a professional bid writer, have been able to develop these skills. Very difficult climate at the moment, particularly with local authorities experiencing cuts to funding. Partnerships are really important. Often have to submit 4 or 5 bids for the same thing in the hope of securing funding.

Mark Davies confirmed that he is very much involved in voluntary work for COS and appreciates the opportunities given.

### **Approve minutes of Group meeting on 3 November 2022 and 23 June 2023**

It was proposed to approve the minutes of the meeting dated 3 November 2022. Alison Bryan moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Rob Wilks (who was not Secretary at the time). There were no objections.

It was proposed to approve the minutes of the meeting dated 23 June 2023. Tony Evans moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Alison Bryan. There were no objections.

***Action: Secretary to send minutes to Table Office.***

### **Matters arising**

The Chair and Secretary confirmed that the Table Office has been informed regarding appointment of Rob Wilks as Secretary. The Secretary has also submitted the Annual Report and Financial Statement.

The following actions from the previous meeting on 23 June 2023 were outstanding:

- Secretary to write a letter to Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice accordingly, on behalf of the Group regarding Invisibility of Deafblind adults in Wales.
- Secretary to organise speakers for future meetings and arrange meetings with sufficient notice to encourage MS to attend.
- Secretary to write letter to Senedd Education Committee, WJEC and Qualifications Wales regarding concerns raised re the GCSE BSL.
- Secretary to raise concerns regarding commissioning of unqualified unregistered translators for consultations with Welsh Government.

The Secretary will action these in the coming weeks.

Polly Winn asked the Secretary if he had a contact for Qualifications Wales. The Secretary will provide this information to Polly Winn when he has it.

**Actions:**

**Secretary to complete all outstanding actions.**

**Secretary to pass on details of contact in Qualifications Wales to Ms Winn when obtained.**

**Petition for Welsh Government to develop a Teacher of the Deaf workforce strategy**

*Hazel Badjie, Head of Policy and Influence, Wales, NDCS*

Please see attached slides.

The Chair raised the matter of the shortage of teachers of the deaf in Wales in the Senedd by way of a question to the Education Minister on 3 May 2023, and in response, the Minister referred to the workforce strategy, and that the ALN reforms and Code included specific reference to Teachers of the Deaf (ToD). Local authorities and schools needed to consult to ensure the learning needs of deaf students could be met and a financial commitment was made towards the postgraduate funding route. The Chair suggested that the Group write to the Education Minister for an update.

Alison Bryan reminded the Group that we in particular need more deaf ToDs. Currently this route / pathway is not nurtured and as such the workforce is not diverse nor representative of the people it serves.

Stuart Parkinson reminded Ms Badjie that it is important to remember that deaf education is not just about ToDs, it is also about peripheral services such as youth clubs etc. He reiterated that deaf children are behind at every stage of education and that this should not be the case. There used to be a ToD course at University of South Wales Newport campus, which has now stopped. Ms Badjie concurred and said that even that course required students to do work experience in England.

Rob Wilks, removing his secretary hat, confirmed that he had been carrying out research into deaf education with Rachel O'Neill at the University of Edinburgh and one of their recommendations for Wales was to set up a ToD course in Wales. Last year, the Group agreed to write to the Education Minister for a response to the report, but he is not sure what came of that. Dr Wilks will email Ms Badjie to arrange a meeting to discuss further the progress he has made in relation to setting up a BSL Partnership for all Welsh universities.

John Day confirmed that on behalf of audiology services in Wales, he endorses the petition and reiterated how important ToDs are to audiologists. He is happy to support and offer support to investment in this profession.

The Chair encouraged everyone to sign the petition and share. He also suggested that the Group write to the Petitions Committee to indicate their support to the petition.

**Actions:**

- **Secretary to draft letter to Education Minister on behalf of the Group raising the above issues and following up on the Chair's question in Senedd of 3 May 2023, and response to Dr Wilks' report.**
- **Members to sign petition at <https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/245870>.**
- **Secretary to write to Petitions Committee to support petition on behalf of Group.**

## **BDA Update**

*Tom Lichy, Policy and Research Lead, BDA*

Tom Lichy introduced himself and apologised for being an Englishman on Welsh territory. The Chair confirmed all are welcome to Wales. Mr Lichy is the Policy and Research Lead at the BDA and has come along in Martin Griffiths' absence.

The BDA were due to meet with Suki Westcott of the Welsh Government in July 2023 which didn't happen, but a meeting has been arranged for 22 November 2023, and they will be discussing the BSL Audit for Wales. Their understanding is that the BSL Audit Report is accepted in principle, but the issue is sourcing funding for its implementation.

Mr Lichy asked the Group if an update could be provided regarding the BDA's audit of the Welsh Government and progress towards a BSL Act in Wales.

In recent visits to deaf clubs in Wales there is growing frustration that there is no act to cover Welsh devolved services like the NHS, social care, education, employment support, arts/leisure and transport.

Feedback from the Welsh Deaf community is that there is also a desire for more Welsh deaf leadership in BSL service delivery and for those services to be delivered by deaf BSL signers themselves and for support to enable Deaf-led professional planning and budget setting on BSL issues. They say that the Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities spend money earmarked for BSL services on non-signers to design and deliver these BSL services. The BDA wants to see Welsh deaf BSL signers designing, managing, delivering and assessing all BSL services in Wales, and are happy to support the Welsh Deaf community in doing so.

Mr Lichy also asked for an update on the Accessible Standards for Communication with People with Sensory Loss as the BDA understands that these standards are being updated but linked to launch of a new NHS App in Wales. The BDA is concerned the app will not be deaf friendly.

Mr Lichy also asked whether BSL issues can piggyback on the Welsh Language Plan on health and social care which establishes Welsh as a health need.

The Chair confirmed that he had raised the need for a BSL Act in Wales twice in the Senedd and received cross-party support for such an Act. However, the Welsh Government has persistently referred to the BDA's audit report, and since its publication, have said that they are continuing to work with the BDA and the Disability Rights Taskforce, but there has not been any report of any progress. Meanwhile, the Chair is keen to put forward a BSL Bill as a Private Member's Bill but needs to have his name drawn out of a ballot first.

Polly Winn confirmed that colleagues at the RNID are involved in the Disability Rights Taskforce, and she is aware that a number of subgroups have been working on creating action plans linked to particular themes, e.g. Children and Young People, and most of their work is now coming to an end. Each action plan will become part of a draft Disability Action Plan which will then go out to consultation, expected to be in the new year. Ms Winn is happy to find out more and report back to the Group.

**Action: Ms Winn to find out more about the work of the Disability Rights Taskforce and report back to the Group.**

Ms Bryan is concerned about the Welsh Government's commitment to a BSL Act given that recently they appointed a hearing person for a senior manager focused on Disability and BSL over a deaf person who also applied for the job.

**Any other business**

Stuart Parkinson mentioned the Child Friendly City Cardiff initiative and informed the Group that Cardiff Youth Service's Digital Team and Deaf Youth Club have won an award in response to their video ' The Obstacles'. He is attending the award ceremony on Friday.

There being no other business, the meeting was concluded.

**Date of next meeting**

- Thursday 4th January, 6.00-7.30pm
- Thursday 25th April, 12.00-1.30pm
- Friday 12th July at 12.30-1.30pm