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The voice for Deaf youth in Wales

William Powell AM  
Chair – Petitions Committee

20<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Dear Mr Powell

**P-04-628 Petition – Deffo! Access to BSL for All**

Thank you for forwarding the response from the Minister Education and Skills, Huw Lewis in relation to the petition submitted by us and I have pleasure in enclosing our response.

- 1) *With reference to the revenue support grant allocated to local authorities across Wales to allow them to meet their statutory duties.*

**Our response:**

We note your comments in relation to Revenue Support Grants (RSG), and the role that this is intended to play in assisting local authorities to meet their statutory duties to provide special education needs (SEN) provision. We also note the comments that the responsibility to provide suitable education provision, including language support rests with local authorities.

Our concern with this rest in the fact that engagement with BSL is a choice for many, rather than a response to an identified medical need. This is despite of the evidence of the long-term benefits for young people engaging with BSL. There is significant pressure on RSG funding particularly at a time of budget constraints, and we would respectfully argue that the flexibility referred to by the Minister does in effect work against those seeking support for BSL. As such we would like to see funding for BSL ring fenced.

- 2) *In regards to the reforming the current legislative framework for supporting learners with Special Educational Needs.*

**Our response:**

We welcome this news, and we hope that children, young people and parents' views are included when developing the proposed reforms. Equally we would hope that the views of the Deaf community could feed into this

reform. Deffo would gladly work with Welsh Government to assist in this process.

- 3) *In reference to the fundamental review of curriculum and assessment by Graham Donaldson*

**Our response:**

We also welcome the fundamental review of curriculum and assessment by Graham Donaldson with the publication of the 'Successful Futures' document. We note that the first phase of 'The Great Debate' is now closed. Unfortunately the response from Welsh Government (6<sup>th</sup> May 2015) did not allow us the time to respond by 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015. It is not obvious as to the level of engagement that was achieved with the Deaf community and would welcome the opportunity to be involved at the next stage or to still be allowed time to respond.

- 4) *The recent publication on the review into the skills of the general education workforce in Wales to the provision of support for children and young people with SEN.*

**Our response:**

We are pleased that review has taken place however this raises our concern similar to that outlined in respect of point 1 above that BSL is often omitted or side-lined. SEN covers a broad base of under-lying conditions and we believe that reviews such as this should explicitly consider BSL moving forwards.

- 5) *Regarding provision for parents and siblings to access BSL training*

**Our response:**

Evidence from our members suggests that siblings and parents really struggle to access training. This creates a real divide in family members not in a position to effectively communicate with each other.

The Minister acknowledges that cuts in Adult Learning have affected provision, none of the users we represent recall engagement with Families First. Those courses that are available are delivered by the third-sector and often require financing by the learner or third parties.

We do not doubt that the Team Around the Family Model is supposed to achieve solutions such as this, but the evidence suggests to the contrary, this may well be again linked to the fact that BSL is a choice rather than a response to medical needs, and as such risks getting lost at times of financial pressure.

In concluding this letter there seems to be some recurring themes, In particular those seeking / needing BSL are often unmet or unidentified. This is often due to

the fact that the need to engage with BSL is a choice (with proven long term educational, economic and emotional benefit) rather than an immediate need. It would feel that this needs review in order to improve the life chances for Deaf young people and their families.

I hope that this information is useful in respect of consideration of this petition.

Yours sincerely

Cathie Robins Talbot  
Deffo! Principal Petitioner