



Elin Jones AC, Llywydd

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

Elin Jones AM, Presiding Officer

National Assembly for Wales

David J Rowlands AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Your ref:
Our ref: PO243/EJ/DT

9 November 2017

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 7 August 2017 in which you asked whether the Commission would explore options for developing a plan to make BSL and/or subtitling available for other Assembly Questions (currently provided for FMQs) and proceedings within a suitable timeframe.

At a recent meeting, Commissioners considered the existing provision of BSL services and subtitling, as well as current plans to extend these services within the constraints of available resources and the technological limitations in providing accurate subtitling of live proceedings.

I thought it would be helpful for the Committee to summarise what is already provided, what changes are planned, and the constraints under which this work is taking place.

Yours sincerely

Elin Jones AM
Llywydd

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg / We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

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What we currently provide and options

Record of Proceedings and committee transcripts

The transcripts of plenary proceedings provide an accessible resource that we publish in draft on a rolling basis. It starts to appear about an hour after the start of plenary and is updated every quarter of an hour. We publish these transcripts initially in the language spoken with a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation where Welsh is spoken. It also includes links to Members' biography pages.

The Record itself is published within 24 hours and includes links to the full voting results and detailed links to senedd.tv. Answers to Oral Questions not reached in plenary meetings are published within 24 hours. The bilingual final version, with all contributions given in both languages, is published within three working days.

We make transcripts of committee meetings available in draft form within three to five working days, with a final version published within 10 working days, which includes the Welsh to English interpretation broadcast during the meeting.

BSL

In April 2016, following S4C's decision to cut the programme 'Y Dydd yn y Cynulliad' which included BSL interpretation of First Minister's Questions, the Commission, recognising the need, agreed to take on the responsibility for operating and funding this service at a cost of £15,000 per year. We provide BSL interpretation for every First Minister's Questions session; this comes to around 5% of total public Assembly business, which matches Ofcom guidelines for broadcasters of 5% of total BSL output. At present, we are the only legislature in the UK that provides this regular service. We do this by recording FMQs live and then giving the interpreter time to watch the session before providing the interpretation. This has improved the accuracy and quality of the service, which interpreters and users have warmly welcomed. The signed sessions are on a dedicated area on senedd.tv (<http://www.senedd.tv/meeting/seneddextra>) and on our YouTube channel.

We have previously explored extending the provision of BSL interpretation – to include the wider plenary proceedings and to committees. However, the BSL interpreters have real concerns about their ability to accurately interpret live



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discussions, given the pace and complexity of proceedings. Our parliamentary and technical language causes them further problems – we use terms for which there is no BSL equivalent and, again, there is the Welsh language challenge – not all interpreters are Welsh-speakers. As a result, to date the interpreters have not agreed to provide services in these areas.

We have looked at extending BSL interpretation to other Minister's Questions sessions. This would require more BSL interpreters to cover the longer hours (interpreters work for short spells on rotation) and we estimate this would add at up to £40,000 per year to the current cost, for which there would need to be additional budget provision.

Sub-titles

We have been actively looking at the introduction of sub-titling since 2014. However, the technology is challenging in terms of accuracy and keeping subtitles synchronised with proceedings, especially when more than one person is speaking. We also have the added challenge of bi-lingual proceedings and the technology available at present does not translate accurately enough to be reliable and effective. However, we continue to push the technology and in the coming months we will evaluate live transcription of Ministers' Statements and a full plenary session.

We are introducing a clipping and download tool for senedd.tv that will allow us to find, select and extract footage from meetings. We would then be able to subtitle these smaller clips accurately, and publish them on our YouTube channel.

What else are we planning to do?

Within Senedd.tv we are going to give BSL videos their own dedicated playlist that is easy to find.

We are going to tweet-out when FMQs became available in BSL on YouTube.

We have quite a number of signed videos that can be re-promoted regularly, especially on YourAssembly.

Outreach/Education do a lot of tailored outreach/education in BSL– we recently used video content from a session like this to promote the Youth Parliament consultation. It went down very well and we will endeavour to do more of this.



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Other things we do to make a difference

We fund BSL interpretation for the cross party group meetings; when a debate relating to deaf issues is scheduled we make interpretation available; we have funded BSL lessons for Assembly staff who meet the public; and hearing induction loops are installed throughout the building, including committee meeting rooms and public galleries.

Our efforts have been repeatedly recognised by the charity Action on Hearing Loss (AHL), which has accredited the National Assembly with the Louder than Words Charter Mark, and have won the Service Excellence category at the recent AHL Cymru Excellence Awards.