

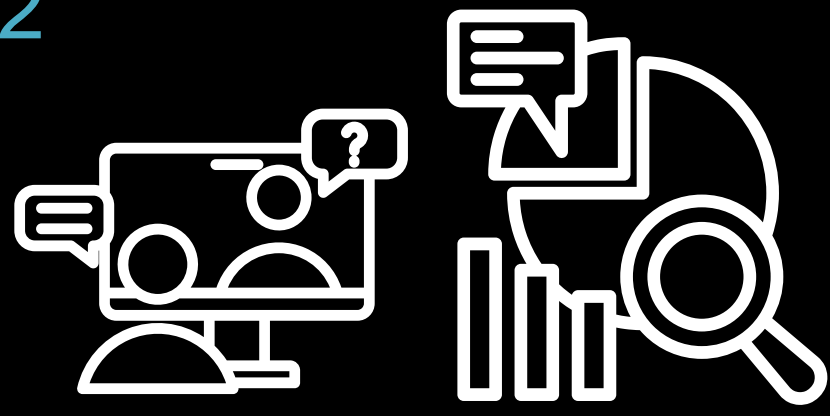
Ten Years On

The impact of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 on the education of deaf children

Rachel O'Neill¹
Rob Wilks²

Methods

21 interviews with stakeholders in Scotland and Wales (policymakers, Teachers of the Deaf (ToDS), and deaf organisations)
Documentary analysis of national/local BSL plans
Thematic coding of language attitudes, policy framing, and implementation gaps



2005 2011 2015 2017

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act passed

Welsh Language (Wales) Measure passed

British Sign Language (Scotland) Act passed

First National BSL Plan (Scotland) published

BSL progress review

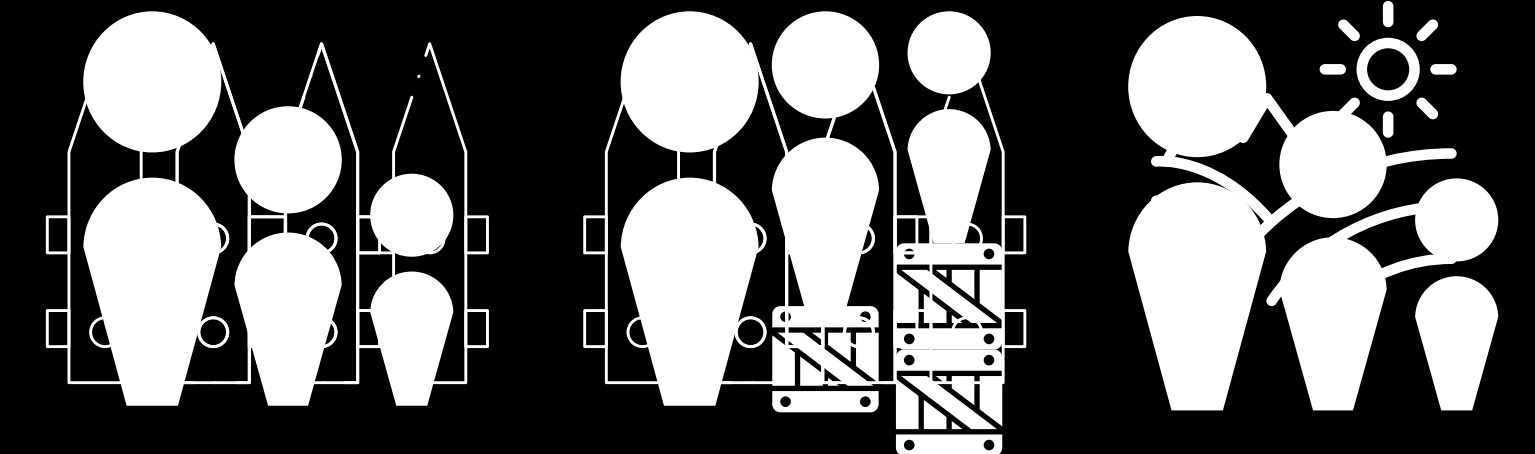
Curriculum for Wales introduced

Second National BSL Plan (Scotland) published

10-year anniversary of BSL (Scotland) Act

2021 2022 2024 2025

Precepts of equality

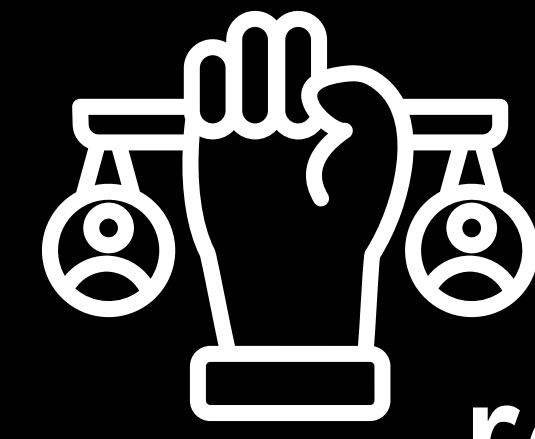


Formal

Substantive

Transformative

Formal – treating everyone the same (status quo)
Substantive – removing the disadvantage (temporary)
Transformative – eliminating the underlying issue (permanent)



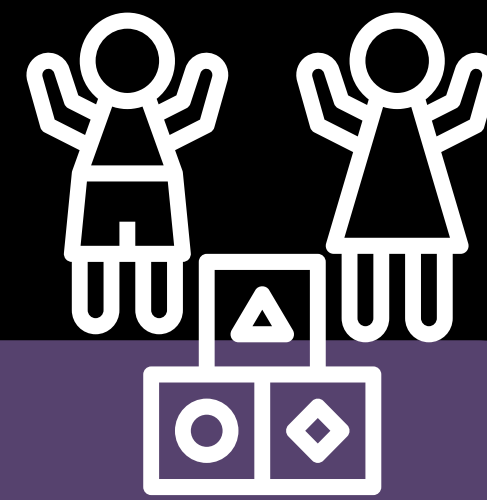
Symbolic recognition is not enough. Transformative change begins with education.

Key findings



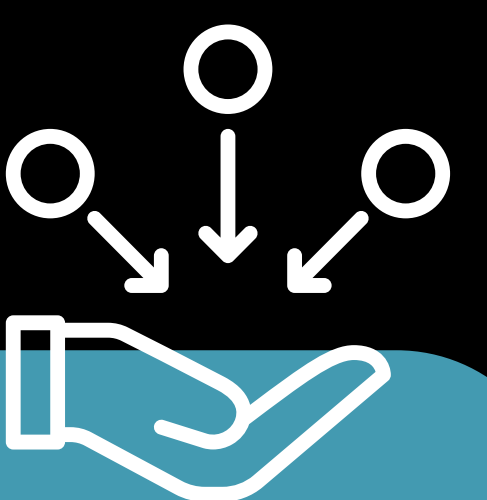
Language attitudes

BSL often seen as a communication tool, not a full language
Early years professionals advised not to sign (“You must speak to her...”)
Strong influence of medical model on deaf education and ToD training
Lack of understanding of bilingualism in deaf education



Early years

No BSL immersion nursery model exists
Patchy or absent provision in local BSL plans
Little support or CPD for early years workforce
Parents often isolated and unaware of BSL options
Contrast: *Mudiad Meithrin* and Gaelic-medium nursery models



Resources

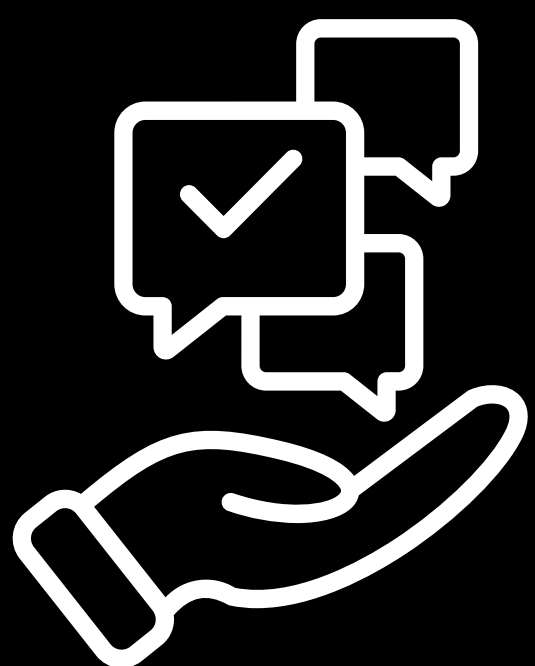
No national register of BSL teachers
Training routes underdeveloped, fragmented, and underfunded
BSL Initial Teacher Education (ITE) not formalised
ToDs have limited BSL fluency
Comparison: funded Gaelic sabbaticals and Welsh CPD pathways



“The medical profession told my parents not to sign to me because it wouldn’t be a good thing to do... ‘You must speak to her, don’t sign.’” (Wilks and O’Neill 2022: 69)

Recommendations

- ✓ Fund bilingual nursery pilots
- ✓ Create national register of BSL teachers
- ✓ Develop formal BSL ITE routes
- ✓ Re-centre language access in ToD training
- ✓ Recognise deaf children as a language minority
- ✓ Move from symbolic to enforceable policy



Comparison table



Dimension	BSL (Scotland)	Gaelic (Scotland)	Welsh (Wales)	BSL (Wales)
Legal framework	Symbolic only – BSL Act 2015 (no rights)	Enforceable – Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005	Enforceable – Cymraeg 2050 & Welsh in Education	No legal status – no BSL-specific legislation
Language status	Dual category: disability vs language	Recognised language minority	Recognised national minority language	Mainly framed as an additional need/disability
Early years provision	Patchy, minimal BSL immersion	State-supported Gaelic nursery playgroups	<i>Mudiad Meithrin</i> : Welsh-medium nurseries	No bilingual BSL settings; no strategic rollout
Curriculum integration	1+2 language in CfE	Gaelic-medium education in CfE	Bilingual model built into CfW	International language in CfW
Teacher training	No official pathway for BSL teachers	Funded routes; Gaelic ITE and sabbaticals	Welsh ITE, CPD support, sabbaticals	No recognised BSL ITE pathway
National exams	BSL awards at SCQF 3–6 (not full qualifications)	Gaelic available for N5/Higher subjects	Welsh used across curriculum and assessments	No GCSE or equivalent; future qualification promised
Implementation power	Councils vary widely; BSL plans non-binding	Bòrd na Gàidhlig can direct planning duties	Welsh in Education required by law; monitored for delivery	No formal requirement to plan for BSL

More information including references and resources can be found online:

