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Welsh Government
Consultation Document

Curriculum for Wales British sign language (BSL) guidance

Date of issue: 1 February 2021
Action required: Responses by 29 March 2021

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Overview

Curriculum for Wales British sign language (BSL) guidance

The Curriculum for Wales Framework was published on 28 January 2020. Before its publication, the Framework was subject to broad and extensive consultation. Feedback received signalled what specific, additional guidance schools and settings would require in order to successfully design and realise their curriculum. Welsh Government committed to publishing:

- a framework for religion, values and ethics
- guidance for relationships and sexuality education
- guidance on careers and work-related experiences
- enabling steps to support practitioners working with learners at the beginning of the learning continuum
- a curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings to adopt
- guidance on developing a curriculum for pupil referral units and for those responsible for the provision of education other than at school
- guidance on British Sign Language.

This feedback phase welcomes your views on the additional Curriculum for Wales guidance that has been developed for BSL.

The guidance has been developed by practitioners through a process of co-construction with the support of experts, and should be used by schools, settings and other practitioners as a tool for curriculum planning, design and implementation. This feedback phase forms part of the co-construction process. It provides an opportunity for all practitioners and other stakeholders to input and help support the development of the guidance.

This feedback phase will end on 29 March 2021, after which all responses will be considered and analysed independently and by practitioner working groups, with support from experts in the area. The draft guidance will then be refined in response to feedback and will form part of an update to the Curriculum for Wales framework in autumn 2021.

Please note: the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill will provide the legislative framework for the Curriculum for Wales and is currently going through the Senedd scrutiny process. Respondents should note that amendments made to the Bill may also impact on the Curriculum for Wales guidance.

How to respond

Responses to this consultation should be e-mailed/posted to the address below to arrive by **29 March** at the latest.

Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

The published Curriculum for Wales guidance is available at

<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>

An easy read version is available at

<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/a-new-curriculum-in-wales-easy-read/>

A children, young people and families guide is available at

<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/a-new-curriculum-in-wales-a-guide-for-children-young-people-and-families/>

The consultation documents can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at

gov.wales/consultations

A BSL version of the Curriculum for Wales BSL guidance will be available on the Education Wales YouTube channel

Contact details

For further information:

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General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The Welsh Government will be data controller for any personal data you provide as part of your response to the consultation. Welsh Ministers have statutory powers they will rely on to process this personal data which will enable them to make informed decisions about how they exercise their public functions. Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about or planning future consultations. Where the Welsh Government undertakes further analysis of consultation responses then this work may be commissioned to be carried out by an accredited third party (e.g. a research organisation or a consultancy company). Any such work will only be undertaken under contract. Welsh Government's standard terms and conditions for such contracts set out strict requirements for the processing and safekeeping of personal data.

In order to show that the consultation was carried out properly, the Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then redact them before publishing.

You should also be aware of our responsibilities under Freedom of Information legislation

If your details are published as part of the consultation response then these published reports will be retained indefinitely. Any of your data held otherwise by Welsh Government will be kept for no more than three years.

Your rights

Under the data protection legislation, you have the right:

- to be informed of the personal data held about you and to access it
- to require us to rectify inaccuracies in that data
- to (in certain circumstances) object to or restrict processing
- for (in certain circumstances) your data to be 'erased'
- to (in certain circumstances) data portability
- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

For further details about the information the Welsh Government holds and its use, or if you want to exercise your rights under the GDPR, please see contact details below:

Data Protection Officer:
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

e-mail: Data.ProtectionOfficer@gov.wales

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are:

Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Tel: 01625 545 745 or
0303 123 1113

Website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Curriculum for Wales British sign language (BSL) guidance

The following is the draft guidance on which we are inviting feedback.

Introduction

This [Curriculum for Wales](#) guidance is for schools, settings and other practitioners involved in designing a curriculum which features BSL. This includes BSL as a first or second language for deaf and hard of hearing learners, and others learning BSL as a third or subsequent language. It forms part of the [Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience \(Area\)](#) and builds on the guidance for this Area.

The four purposes

The Curriculum for Wales framework guidance aims to help each school and setting develop its own curriculum, enabling learners to realise the [four purposes](#) – the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales – so that they become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Learning BSL can contribute to realising all four purposes.

Ambitious, capable learners

Through learning BSL, hearing and deaf learners of all ages can develop their ability and ambition to communicate using sign within deaf and hearing communities. Learning BSL can deepen learners' understanding of human communication more generally and strengthen knowledge of how languages work, providing a firm foundation for further language learning. Insights that can be derived through learning BSL include becoming aware of the multi-modality of human communication and of the role played by gesture.

The study of any language system allows learners to develop their understanding of how communication is central to the human condition, and working out how BSL is put together can support metacognition. The knowledge and skills acquired in BSL are of value and relevance for immediate and longer-term use in learning, life and work.

Enterprising, creative contributors

Effective BSL skills can help learners make sense of concepts across the curriculum, for example by enabling them to articulate their reasoning when solving problems and analysing information. Effective multilingual skills deepen this ability as they enable learners to respond in many more contexts.

Visual communication encourages creative thinking and learners must be willing to experiment, take risks, step up to challenges and apply strategies to resolve communication issues. These skills can build learners' confidence, allowing them to grasp new opportunities and to adapt to different roles.

Ethical, informed citizens

As learners progress in their ability to understand and use BSL, they can also develop a range of skills, such as cognitive flexibility, and interpersonal and cultural agility. Learning BSL can encourage learners to step beyond familiar cultural boundaries and develop new ways of expressing and negotiating meaning, allowing them to contribute to the development of a global society that is inclusive for deaf and hearing people. This can include, for example, addressing issues surrounding disability rights, minority languages, recognition of BSL and communication through technology.

Teaching and learning should help develop awareness and understanding of the cultures and identities of deaf and hearing communities where BSL is a first language or is routinely used for daily communication in support of other languages. This can include an awareness of regional variation in BSL.

Healthy, confident individuals

Communication and well-being are inextricably linked. Effective language skills allow us to independently manage everyday life. BSL skills and being part of the Deaf community can enhance deaf learners' self-identity. Skills in BSL can allow learners to express themselves effectively, to be open to other people's points of view and to develop positive relationships. Visual communication can help build greater confidence and break through communication barriers.

Cross-curricular skills and skills integral to the four purposes

A school curriculum must develop the mandatory cross-curricular skills and the integral skills that underpin the four purposes of the curriculum. The following are some key aspects which schools and settings should consider when designing learning and teaching for BSL.

Cross-curricular skills

Digital skills

Learning in BSL and digital skills can support each other. Learners can develop the skills to communicate remotely in BSL, find and use BSL resources online, and create and share their own digital BSL materials. Learners should have the opportunity to explore technology best suited to their communication needs.

Literacy

BSL is a visual language and does not have a written form: filmed sign language is used rather than text.

When deaf children learn the orthography of Welsh, English or another spoken language, they do so without the auditory clues that hearing children use. The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) has [more information](#) on teaching deaf children to read.

Numeracy

Learning BSL numerals and signs for quantities, time and money can help develop learners' conceptual understanding. BSL counting systems are one-handed and can provide insight into different number bases.

Integral skills

Creativity and innovation

Learning can provide opportunities to experiment with and use BSL creatively in order to give learners the confidence to take risks, to express opinions and to generate ideas in a plurilingual context that can lead to innovative outcomes. They can develop their creativity through opportunities to create and perform BSL literature. Creative expression can enhance learners' understanding of key concepts as well as methods of expression.

Critical thinking and problem-solving

Receptive and productive skills in BSL can contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving. These skills can be honed by communicating with others in order to understand situations, articulate ideas and develop responses to problems.

Personal effectiveness

Learners can develop their personal effectiveness and self-awareness when learning and using BSL, which can in turn support learning across the whole curriculum. Providing a language-rich and plurilingual environment can support learners to reflect on their own strengths in language use and to identify their own areas of development in order to enhance their language and communication skills continually.

Planning and organising

Learning BSL should enable learners to develop the skills to select and use appropriate sources and information. This allows them to organise ideas, make effective plans and develop creative works. Given the opportunity to use language skills to present plans and implement solutions with clarity, learners can reflect on their work and plan and implement further improvements.

Progression in BSL

Deaf children often have late exposure to sign language. This is not surprising given that most of them are born to hearing parents who are, initially at least, unlikely to be sign language users themselves. This can have long-term effects on a child's language and cognitive development.

Hearing technologies such as cochlear implants are not provided until after one year of age and the rehabilitation process after the implant is activated takes an extended period of time. BSL allows children to be surrounded by an accessible language at all times, whether or not they go on to develop good skills in spoken language.

BSL is a visual language with its own grammar and lexicon. Research studies have shown that acquisition of sign language follows a similar pattern to the acquisition of spoken languages, despite the difference in modality between them. This is also true for the development of specific aspects of language like phonology, vocabulary and narratives ('story-telling').

Phonology

For spoken languages, phonology refers to the way that the sounds of a language are put together to form words. For sign languages, phonology refers to how the elements of a sign are put together: how handshape, location, movement, orientation and non-manual features are combined to form signs. As is the case with those learning spoken languages, phonological development in deaf children who are learning to sign takes time, and learners

are likely to make mistakes in the early stages of language development. Learners often substitute handshapes that are difficult to make with handshapes that are easier to produce and they may also simplify movements.

Vocabulary

Research has shown that vocabulary acquisition is similar in both sign and spoken languages. Those learning sign language typically produce their first sign at around 11 months of age. By the time they are 18 months old, they can know around 70-80 signs. By the age of three, they are able to understand and produce around 500 signs. As with spoken languages, there are external factors that influence vocabulary acquisition, such as the extent and quality of sign language to which they are exposed. In addition, the main carer's BSL fluency also has an impact on the development path and size of the learner's BSL vocabulary.

Although vocabulary acquisition follows a similar timetable in sign language and spoken language, it is important to remember that hearing children and young people will often pick up new words through incidental learning. They will overhear conversations and pick up words from the television or other media. They will also pick up new words when reading. For sign languages, there are no written forms. Children and young people learning sign language need to look at people to learn new signs. This means it is incredibly important for children and young people learning sign languages to be exposed to good models of sign language on a regular basis. It also means that they should have access to signing environments where they can see other conversations. There are television programmes that are either presented in BSL or have an in-vision interpreter. Schools and settings can help facilitate learners' access to these. Vocabulary size (whether in a signed or spoken language) is an important predictor of subsequent development of literacy.

Narratives

BSL research suggests that the development of the ability to tell stories is similar in sign and spoken languages, with young deaf children starting to produce narratives at around two years of age. Being able to put together a narrative verbally (whether via sign or speech) is an important predictor of good literacy skills, thus young signers should be introduced to narratives at an early age, particularly by good signing models.

(NDCS has [resources](#) that may support progression of deaf learners affected by late acquisition, while [UCL Deafness Cognition and Language research centre](#) (DCAL) has more information on BSL research).

BSL progression and the Curriculum for Wales

BSL is a visual language, so where the [Languages, Literacy and Communication Area statements of what matters](#) refer to listening and reading, speaking and writing, equivalent receptive and productive skills should be considered for BSL.

The [descriptions of learning](#) that show how learners progress in relation to the statement of what matters entitled *Languages connect us* are common to all learners in all schools and settings in Wales. In the context of BSL, the meaning of the word 'identity' in the descriptions will include identity as a deaf person and sign language user in Wales and the wider world. It will include Deaf culture alongside other cultures. Similarly, the word 'belonging' includes belonging in the local Deaf community and the wider Deaf community as well as other communities to which the learner may belong. This statement of what matters also has a particular relevance to deaf learners whose simultaneous progression in BSL and Welsh/English may mean they are more able than their hearing counterparts to

move between languages and cultures. Their ability to understand that words and signs do not always have direct equivalence, and to recognise different interpretations and explain these to others, is recognised in the descriptions of learning for this statement of what matters as a valuable skill.

For the other statements of what matters in this Area, descriptions of learning are being developed to show progression in BSL from progression step 1 to progression step 5 for deaf learners for whom BSL is the first or predominant language, for example:

Progression Step 1	Progression Step 2	Progression Step 3	Progression Step 4	Progression Step 5
<p>I can understand and use basic concepts in language.</p> <p>I am beginning to understand and identify examples of BSL phonology (handshape, location, movement, orientation and non-manual features).</p>	<p>I can understand and identify key BSL grammatical features.</p>	<p>I can engage with BSL communication and literature to gain an understanding of how grammar affects meaning.</p>	<p>I can use my knowledge of grammar to support my understanding of BSL communication and literature.</p>	<p>I can use my knowledge of word construction, grammar, including syntax, and organisation to support my understanding of signed communication and literature.</p>

Descriptions of learning for BSL as a third or subsequent language are being developed to show progression from progression step 3 to progression step 5, in line with descriptions of learning for international languages in the Curriculum for Wales, for example:

Progression step 3	Progression step 4	Progression step 5
<p>I can understand signs which occur most often in BSL.</p>	<p>I can employ a range of strategies to recognise and predict the general meaning across a range of BSL communication and literature.</p>	<p>I can employ a range of strategies to recognise and predict the general meaning across a wide range of BSL communication and literature, and can understand implied ideas.</p>

BSL descriptions of learning will be available alongside the descriptions of learning for Welsh, English and other international languages in the [Languages, Literacy and Communication Area guidance](#) from autumn 2021.

Assessment

It is especially important to track and assess deaf learners' language development on a regular basis. A range of normed assessment tools have been developed for this purpose:

- The BSL Receptive Skills Test (BSL-SRT)
(Assessment primarily of BSL morphology for children aged 3-12)
- The BSL Production Skills Test - Narrative Skills BSL-PT
(Assessment of BSL narrative skills for children aged 4–11)
- Test of Child Speechreading (TOCS)
(Assessment of speechreading skills for deaf children aged 4–15)
- The BSL Vocabulary Test (VT)
(Computer-based assessment of signed language understanding and production for children aged 4–15 years).

These tests are available online through the [DCAL portal](#). NDCS also has [resources](#) to support practitioners with assessments for deaf learners.

There are no statutory assessments for BSL in Wales.

Cross-cutting themes for curriculum design

Schools and practitioners should have a methodology for designing a curriculum which incorporates, where appropriate, opportunities for consideration of cross-cutting elements.

Local, national international context

BSL is an indigenous minority language and the first language of many deaf and hard of hearing children and young people in Wales. Welsh Government formally recognised BSL as a language in its own right in January 2014.

Learning BSL can inspire and enable learners to:

- become multilingual, able to use BSL, Welsh, English and at least one other international language, which could be an international sign language such as American sign language (ASL), and develop an openness to and curiosity about all languages and cultures of the world
- enjoy learning languages and develop a positive perception of themselves as users of those languages
- use the language(s) and culture(s) of their homes and communities, including Deaf culture, as a foundation for subsequent language learning
- have a firm foundation in BSL, Welsh and English to build on when learning other languages and when broadening their understanding of national and global contexts
- reflect on their personal and local linguistic heritage
- become knowledgeable about the diversity of local, national and international linguistic and cultural heritage
- develop their own sense of linguistic identity within their locality, Wales and the wider world
- immerse themselves in local, national and international cultures and languages through visits, engaging with people locally and globally, and connecting digitally
- foster an understanding of the culture and identity of those around them, to develop mutual respect and social cohesion
- develop an appreciation of BSL literature.

Human rights education and diversity

Some aspects of rights and diversity to consider when designing a curriculum which includes BSL are included below.

The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) refers specifically to sign languages seven times across five articles. Article 24 relates to education.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) articles are available [in BSL](#).

As the first language of many deaf and hard of hearing children and young people, BSL is a medium through which they can communicate effectively and be fully involved in the decisions that affect them. The UNCRC states that children have the right to use their own language and culture even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen to and take children seriously. Children also have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel. BSL can facilitate this.

Children have the right to get information from the internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Learning and teaching can support deaf learners to access appropriate information in BSL and in other languages they understand.

Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. BSL can be used as a medium to achieve this.

Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities. Having more learners and practitioners able to use BSL can help support inclusivity.

Careers and work-related experiences

When designing a curriculum, schools and settings should incorporate opportunities for learners to have experiences that enable them to:

- develop knowledge of the enhanced career opportunities available through BSL
- understand that being bilingual or multilingual can open doors in the world of work
- develop effective communication skills in all their languages and develop confidence to interact with others and build relationships in all places of work
- develop language associated with work when learning BSL
- explore how their language skills can benefit them as they prepare for agile and flexible working in Wales and beyond
- have deaf role models with [interesting](#) and [varied](#) jobs.

Curriculum design

When planning, designing and implementing a curriculum, consideration should be given to the nature of BSL provision, resources, learners' progression and the range of linguistic and cultural experiences offered.

Both deaf and hearing learners can benefit from a language-rich environment where BSL is as prominent as Welsh and English and where BSL is used across the whole school environment and throughout the school day.

Questions are provided below to help schools and settings reflect on their curriculum planning and design, learning and teaching.

Considerations for provision

What is the current linguistic landscape of your school? How many BSL users and/or deaf learners are there? Do you have links with the Deaf community? How can you best use the linguistic landscape to help your learners make progress in all their languages?

How will you ensure that all learners continue to progress in BSL from their different starting points?

How will you provide for systematic development of phonology, vocabulary and narratives?

How will learners' progression in BSL be assessed?

How will you ensure that a BSL language-rich environment – including face-to-face and remote interaction within and beyond the classroom – becomes a model for improving learners' BSL skills?

How will you provide breadth and depth in BSL learning?

How can you provide BSL users with opportunities to progress in Welsh, English and at least one international language?

How will you support progression in BSL? How will you support progression across the curriculum through BSL?

How will you provide opportunities for learners to use BSL in a wide range of contexts, for example through meeting with deaf role models, engaging with local BSL communities and becoming involved with Deaf activities?

How will you ensure the quality of BSL learning and teaching, support and interaction?

How will you work with the Deaf community and outside organisations to support curriculum planning and designing, learning and teaching?

How will you support BSL users with additional learning needs, for example through tactile signing (hand over hand signing) or adjusting the visual frame of signing?

Considerations for culture, literature and creativity

Storytelling is an important aspect of BSL. How will learners access BSL literature?

How will you provide learners with a wide range of BSL literature to foster their enjoyment of purposeful viewing, and encourage them to explore literature in BSL and other languages?

How will you provide opportunities to experience Deaf-specific events such as sports, cultural events and arts events?

Key links between BSL and other areas of learning and experience

Because BSL can do all the things that other languages can do, deaf learners can use it across all the areas of learning and experience. It has higher-level vocabulary for use in academic subject areas, and resources such as the BSL [Glossaries of Curriculum Terms](#) can be used to explicitly teach learners cross-curricular vocabulary.

Expressive Arts

Sign poetry, Deaf theatre, Deaf comedy and Deaf visual arts can support learning in Expressive Arts as well as in BSL and be used to heighten deaf cultural awareness. Organisations such as [Music and the Deaf](#) can provide information and inspiration.

Health and Well-being

Skills in BSL can allow learners to express themselves effectively, to be open to other people's points of view and to develop positive relationships. BSL enables deaf learners' self-advocacy and can help mitigate the risk of isolation, exclusion and frustration that deaf people may face.

Learning and teaching in Health and Well-being can improve awareness of Deaf culture and understanding of issues surrounding disability rights, minority languages and recognition of BSL.

Humanities

Learning about the history of Deafness and about deaf people in history can help contribute to a better understanding of Deaf identity and culture today, locally, nationally and internationally. Learners can explore the concepts of justice, equality and rights through learning about Deaf culture and BSL.

Mathematics and Numeracy

Finding and applying patterns and problem-solving are skills required for progression in both BSL and Mathematics and Numeracy. Learning BSL numerals and learning to sign quantities, time and money, for example, can help support conceptual understanding of mathematics. BSL counting systems are one-handed and can provide insight into different number bases.

Science and Technology

Learning about hearing and deafness and about technologies such as hearing aids and cochlear implants can help provide an understanding of deaf issues.

Digital communication offers opportunities for links to reinforce learning in both BSL and Science and Technology. Design communication skills can also bring the two together both in developing learners' design thinking as well as communicating their ideas to others.

