BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (WALES) ACT 2026

EXPLANATORY NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. These Explanatory Notes are for the British Sign Language (Wales) Act 2026 ("the Act") which was passed by Senedd Cymru on 11 March 2026 and received Royal Assent on 27 April 2026. They have been prepared by the Welsh Government on behalf of Mark Isherwood MS, the Member in Charge of the Bill, to assist the reader of the Act. The Explanatory Notes relate to the Act as it received Royal Assent.[1] They should be read in conjunction with the Act but are not part of it.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE ACT

2. British Sign Language ("BSL") is the first or preferred language of many deaf BSL signers in the UK. Much like Welsh and English, it has its own grammar, vocabulary and language structure. It includes a visual form of BSL, and a tactile form used by some deafblind people. The aim of the Act is to promote the use of BSL in Wales. The Act does so by imposing various new duties on the Welsh Ministers and on certain public bodies.

3. The Act requires the Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL and, in order to fulfil that requirement, produce a national BSL strategy that describes both how they themselves intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL, and how they intend to encourage certain public bodies to do so. The Welsh Ministers must issue those public bodies with guidance about promoting and facilitating the use of BSL. The Welsh Ministers must also appoint someone as their BSL adviser, together with a panel of people to assist the adviser.

4. Certain public bodies listed in the Act are required to produce plans describing how they intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.

5. Both the Welsh Ministers and the listed public bodies are required to report on progress made.

6. The Act has 12 sections and one Schedule.

[1] Changes that have been made to the Act since it received Royal Assent can be identified using the "Changes to Legislation" facility at www.legislation.gov.uk/changes.

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

Section 1- British Sign Language

7. As a result of section 1, references to "BSL" in the Act are to both the visual and tactile forms of British Sign Language, except for:
    a. various provisions that require documents to be made available in BSL, and
    b. the Schedule's requirements as to the adviser's BSL skills and experience.

8. As a result of these exceptions:
    - where the Act requires that a document be made available in BSL, this means the visual form only (because the nature of tactile BSL means it cannot be published), and
    - the Welsh Ministers are only required to satisfy themselves that the person appointed as BSL adviser (see paragraph 25 below) is able to communicate effectively in and uses, and has personal experience of, the *visual form* of BSL (so while the Welsh Ministers may appoint someone whose communication skills and experience are of the tactile form too, that is not a prerequisite).

Section 2 – Welsh Ministers' duty to promote BSL

9. Section 2 places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.

Section 3 – National BSL strategy

10. Subsection (1) requires the Welsh Ministers to produce a national strategy in order to fulfil their duty to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.

11. The strategy must describe, first, how the Welsh Ministers intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL in the exercise of their own functions (subsection (2)(a)(i)) and, secondly, how they intend to encourage certain public bodies to do the same (subsection (2)(a)(ii)). Section 9 lists those public bodies (referred to in these Explanatory Notes as "listed public bodies").

12. As a result of subsection (2)(b), the BSL strategy must include targets to increase or maintain:
    a. the numbers of BSL translators and interpreters available for the purpose of exercising the Welsh Ministers', and the listed public bodies', functions, and
    b. the numbers of persons available for the purpose of teaching and assessing those translators and interpreters.

13. Subsection (2)(c) requires that the strategy set out what information about the use of BSL in Wales was obtained and considered for the purpose of preparing the BSL strategy.

14. The Welsh Ministers must publish the strategy within 18 months beginning with the day after the date the Act comes into force (subsection (3)(a)), and review it at least once every six years (subsection (3)(b)). The strategy (including any revised versions) must be laid before Senedd Cymru (subsection (4)(a)) and made available in BSL (subsection (4)(b)).

15. Subsections (5) and (6) set out how, and when, the Welsh Ministers must involve certain persons in the process of preparing the strategy.

Section 4 – BSL guidance

16. Subsection (1) requires the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance to the listed public bodies on how they may promote and facilitate the use of BSL in the exercise of their functions.

17. The Welsh Ministers must issue the guidance no later than the date on which the BSL strategy is published (subsection (2)(a)) and may issue revised guidance at any time (subsection (2)(b)).

18. The Welsh Ministers must publish the guidance (subsection (3)(a)) and ensure it is available in BSL (subsection (3)(b)).

19. Subsection (4) sets out who the Welsh Ministers must consult before issuing the guidance.

Section 5 – BSL plans

20. Section 5(1) requires the listed public bodies to prepare and publish plans that describe how they intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL in exercising their functions and follow the guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers. The plans must also contain any other information the Welsh Ministers may prescribe by regulations (subsection (1)(c)).

21. Subsection (2) requires the listed public bodies to publish their plans within 12 months beginning with the day after publication of the national BSL strategy.

22. A listed public body must review its plan if directed to do so by the Welsh Ministers (subsection (3)(a)) or if the Welsh Ministers revise the national BSL strategy (subsection (3)(b)). And if a listed public body decides to revise its plan following a review, it must publish the revised version (subsection (5)).

23. Subsections (6) and (7) set out how, and when, the listed public bodies must involve certain persons in the process of preparing the plans.

24. The listed public bodies must ensure their plans are made available in BSL and sent to the Welsh Ministers (subsection (8)).

Section 6 – BSL adviser

25. Subsection (1) requires the Welsh Ministers to appoint a BSL adviser and members of a panel to assist the adviser.

26. The adviser may provide information and advice to the Welsh Ministers about the Welsh Ministers' functions under the Act (and must do so if requested by Welsh Ministers). And, as long as the Welsh Ministers agree to this, the adviser may also provide information or advice to any other person in relation to promoting and facilitating the use of BSL in Wales.

27. The Welsh Ministers must also:
    a. involve the adviser in preparing the national BSL strategy (see section 3(5)(a));
    b. consult the adviser before issuing BSL guidance (see section 4(4)(a));
    c. consult the adviser about the Welsh Ministers' progress reports (see section 8(6)(a)); and
    d. consult the adviser before making regulations that alter which bodies are "listed public bodies" (and which therefore have duties placed on them by this Act) (see section 9(3)(a)).

28. Subsection (7) introduces a Schedule that makes further provision about the BSL adviser and panel, including:
    a. a requirement that the Welsh Ministers be satisfied that the person appointed as adviser is able to communicate effectively in BSL and has appropriate personal understanding of the experiences of BSL signers (and a requirement that the Welsh Ministers seek the advice of a BSL signer in this regard);
    b. provisions about the facilities that can be made available to the adviser, and about the adviser's and panel members' remuneration.

Section 7 – Reports by listed public bodies

29. Subsection (1) requires listed public bodies to publish reports that detail what they have done to implement their BSL plans (see section 5) and, if they have not implemented something, explain why not.

30. The reports must be published within 12 months beginning with the day after the listed public body publishes its plan under section 5; they must be made available in BSL and sent to the Welsh Ministers (subsection (2)).

Section 8 – Reports by the Welsh Ministers

31. The Welsh Ministers must publish a report assessing the progress made in promoting and facilitating the use of BSL in accordance with the Act (subsection (1)). This will include assessing both what the Welsh Ministers have done in accordance with their duties under the Act and also the progress that has been made in accordance with the Act more generally.

32. The report must include an explanation of the consideration the Welsh Ministers have given as to whether to alter which bodies are "listed public bodies" for the purposes of the Act (subsection (5)).

33. For the purpose of preparing the report, the Welsh Ministers must obtain appropriate information about the use of BSL in Wales on a sufficiently regular basis to enable them to assess progress (subsection (2)), and they may require listed public bodies to provide them with information (subsection (4)).

34. The report must be published at least once in every period of three years beginning with the day after the BSL strategy is published (subsection (3)(a)). It must be laid before Senedd Cymru (subsection(3)(b)) and be made available in BSL (subsection (3)(c)).

35. Subsection (6) sets out the persons the Welsh Ministers must consult in preparing the report.

Section 9 – Meaning of "listed public body"

36. Subsection (1) sets out the "listed public bodies" to whom various duties described in these Explanatory Notes apply. The Welsh Ministers may make regulations that alter which bodies are on this list (subsection (2)) and they must consult relevant persons (subsection (3)) before making any alterations.

Section 10 – Regulations

37. Section 10 sets out how powers to make regulations under the Act (under sections 5(1)(c) and 9(2)) are to be exercised and the applicable procedure of Senedd Cymru to be followed in making those regulations. For regulations made under section 5(1)(c), this will be the Senedd annulment procedure (meaning that the statutory instrument containing the regulations becomes law when it is made but can be annulled by Senedd Cymru), and for regulations made under section 9(2), this will be the Senedd approval procedure (meaning that the instrument containing them only becomes law if it is approved by a vote in Senedd Cymru).

Section 11 – Coming into force

38. Section 11 provides that the whole of the Act comes into force on the day after the day it receives Royal Assent.

Section 12 – Short title

39. Section 12 sets out the short title of the Act, by which it may be known and referred. Either the Welsh or the English language title of the Act may be used, including as a citation in other enactments.

Schedule – BSL Adviser

40. See paragraph 28 of these Explanatory Notes.

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS IN SENEDD CYMRU

41. The following table sets out the dates for each stage of the Act's passage through the Senedd. The Record of Proceedings and further information on the passage of this Act can be found on the Senedd website at: British Sign Language (Wales) Act

Stage	**Date**
Introduced	14 July 2025
Stage 1 - Debate	17 December 2025
Stage 2 Scrutiny Committee – consideration of amendments	26 January 2026
Stage 3 Plenary - consideration of amendments	4 March 2026
Stage 4 Approved by the Senedd	11 March 2026
Royal Assent	27 April 2026