

Submission from Tony Forry

I believe no Bill has ever passed in the Scottish Parliament with the word “British” in its title.

‘British’ within the title of a Bill, or Act, should be left to the Westminster Parliament as their remit is UK wide.

The Scottish Parliament is representative of people and organisations based in Scotland, focusing on issues that are relevant to Scotland and **not** those that are UK wide.

I believe the consultation on the Proposed ‘BSL’ Bill should re-think their position on referring to ‘BSL’ in Scotland and consider changing the Bill to refer to **Scottish Sign Language (SSL)**.

This may help the Scottish Government to appreciate the language’s importance, as an **indigenous** language of Scotland, and make it more easily protected by the law, in the same way as Scots Gaelic.

The Government in New Zealand is a pertinent example here, having passed the ‘New Zealand Sign Language’ Act in June 2006. This, despite it being well known that New Zealand SL has ‘BSL’ as its root language, in much the same that English is the spoken language of that country, due to the number of British immigrants that made their homes there.

They have chosen not to refer to ‘BSL’ in their Act and instead recognise their indigenous Sign Language that has developed over the years, namely ‘NZSL’.

Likewise, there is **no reason** why Scottish Sign Language should not be considered as the indigenous sign language of this country.

If the Scottish Government agreed to introduce a **Scottish** Sign Language Bill it would be more relevant in a Scottish context vis-a-vis our unique Scottish educational system; a system which is totally different to the rest of UK.

A dangerous precedent could arise if we have a ‘BSL’ Bill in that, courses for learning sign language would increasingly have to be bought, or copied from, English organisations. We wouldn’t use the English school system in a Scottish school so why use English run SL courses for Scottish students?

Adding to the above point, having a **Scottish** Sign Language Bill will increase the confidence of all those involved i.e. knowing that their sign classes are co-ordinated by people who live in Scotland. Otherwise families, friends, students may end up learning BSL from English run courses which implies that Scotland doesn’t have a “real” sign Language of its own.

I am proud we have a Scottish Parliament as I believe it has served us, the people of Scotland, well. I am sure many others will agree with me that the present Scottish Government is thriving in its attempt to improve equality.

This is not our experience of the Westminster Government who chose to offer recognition of BSL from **only one Department**, namely, the DWP.

This incomplete recognition by Westminster has left us placed firmly in the Medical model of Disability, rather than being classed as a linguistic minority, like Welsh or Gaelic.

I sincerely hope that all MSPs will support and approve the proposal of a change to a **Scottish** Sign Language Bill.

Tony Forry
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