British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill

Submission from NHS Western Isles to the Scottish Parliament
Education and Culture Committee for evidence

General approach

1. *Do you think we need to change the law to promote the use of BSL and, if so, why?*

   We think not. We contend that bringing in another law will not make any difference to the quality of BSL provision, given the robust protection already enshrined in statute in the 2010 Equality Act.

2. *Do you think that the aim of leading public authorities to increase the use they make of BSL and the extent to which they are in a position to respond to demand for services in BSL is realistic?*

   We do not think this is realistic, with respect. Given the heavy regulatory burden that is already falling on public authorities, it is unreasonable, we contend, to impose this additional beauracracy without at the same time there being any commitment stated in the preamble of the Bill to confer supplementary funding. These demands also do not appear to take account of regional variations in the BSL population demography throughout the country.

3. *Could there be unintended consequences for other languages or forms of communication used by the deaf community?*

   There is potentially the risk that other important communication conduits could suffer. There is a great need to improve the availability & arrangements for Textphone. Makaton is still used by a significant number, especially those with hearing impairments in the learning disability community.

   In addition, there are 2,000 deaf/blind people in Scotland. There is a lack of awareness of how they benefit from tactile signing, with the according insufficiency of resources for the deaf/blind manual alphabet.
4. What should the designated Minister for BSL do?

We would like to see this person issue & oversee robust guidelines for BSL usage in Scotland. We feel strongly that there should be an emphasis therein on the importance of communication & information sharing between the agencies who have a duty of care with regard to BSL & other communication challenges, as this is pivotal for risk management & harm minimisation.

Most often, the worst communication malfunctions in public life do not occur within the BSL community, but are perpetrated on them from on high. It is this that leads to patient safety breaches & similar adverse incidents, which only compound the disenfranchisement of the BSL community from society.

5. Will the Performance Review process ensure that both Ministers & public authorities will be held to account?

It will be fair to hold Ministers & public authorities to account, with the caveat that there should be resources/additional funding allocated to underpin the expectations.