

Action Plan

Research Engagement with the Welsh Deaf Community

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Introduction

Funded by the University of the West of England Bristol's Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), this project aimed to expand research accessibility and engagement within the Welsh deaf community by translating a recently published article into British Sign Language (BSL) and Welsh. The article (Wilks, 2024) uses doctrinal, socio-legal, and autoethnographic methods to examine whether the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) has taken account of deaf people's needs. It concludes that the Act does not explicitly mention the Welsh deaf community, and there is no evidence that public bodies have considered them in practice. The article highlights wider patterns of marginalisation, worsened by the closure of deaf schools and the decline of deaf clubs, and calls on the Welsh Government and the Future Generations Commissioner to ensure deaf people's well-being is meaningfully addressed in line with the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (2024).

Building on previous work with the Wales BSL and Deaf Research Group and the Learned Society of Wales (LSW), which included a research sandpit in Swansea, two community workshops were held in Colwyn Bay and Haverfordwest, regions not reached in the earlier project. The workshops were an opportunity to share the findings from the article and gather community feedback, followed by a feedback survey. They contributed to this action plan for the Research Group and a best-practice toolkit designed to guide researchers on effective, culturally responsive engagement with the Welsh deaf community. This should foster deeper connections between academia and deaf communities, aligning well with HEIF's goals to promote knowledge exchange and social impact within local communities.

This action plan is based on feedback gathered from the research sandpit in Swansea and the community workshops in North and West Wales, as well as a follow-up survey. It identifies five key priorities for researchers to improve engagement with the Welsh deaf community. Each section begins with evidence from participants, followed by practical actions to take forward.

Objectives

The objectives of the HEIF-funded project were to:

1. Provide the Welsh deaf community with direct access to scholarly knowledge through high-quality BSL and Welsh translations.
2. Share research findings in Colwyn Bay (North Wales) and Haverfordwest (West Wales) via two workshops.
3. Gather community insights through workshops and a follow-up feedback survey.
4. Develop two practical outputs:
 - a. Action plan for the Wales BSL and Deaf Research Group.
 - b. Toolkit for researchers, offering guidelines on culturally appropriate and accessible engagement with the deaf community.

Activities

Research Sandpit (Swansea)

The Swansea research sandpit, held on 22 March 2024, formed part of the Learned Society of Wales project *Expanding the BSL and Deaf Research Network in Wales*. The event was organised by a steering group of the Wales BSL and Deaf Research Group and delivered in a hybrid format to enable participation from across Wales. 10 participants attended in person, with a further five joining online.

The sandpit was designed to provide a creative and inclusive space for experimentation, discussion, and idea generation between academic and non-academic stakeholders. Its objectives were to:

- identify research priorities concerning deaf people and the Welsh deaf community;
- explore methodologies and approaches for future deaf-related research in Wales; and
- develop strategies to increase deaf researcher participation and support.

The day was structured around three breakout sessions:

- **Research priorities** - participants emphasised the importance of deaf education, opportunities to meet and socialise, equal experiences with hearing peers, and the role of campaigns such as the BSL Bill.
- **Research process and dissemination** - participants reported feeling uninformed about ongoing research in Wales and highlighted the need for accessible dissemination. Face-to-face communication was preferred by older deaf people and those in rural areas, while digital channels were seen as useful but insufficient on their own. Concerns about “research burden” were raised, with participants stressing that repeated questions should be avoided by banking and re-using existing data.
- **Participation and training** - strong interest was expressed in being more involved in research, with participants identifying mentoring, shadowing, and training as essential first steps. They also highlighted opportunities for involvement in blogs, websites, data collection, and outreach, noting that such contributions should be recognised and resourced in future grant applications.

Outcomes of the sandpit included clear agreement on the need for a Wales-wide communication network (including snowball email updates and outreach to younger deaf people), the importance of visible deaf role models, and the value of building long-term capacity through training and mentoring. Feedback was highly positive, with participants feeling engaged and included in shaping the group’s future agenda.

These insights fed directly into subsequent activities of the Wales BSL and Deaf Research Group, including webinars and the development of future funding applications, and they provided a strong foundation for the HEIF-funded project to produce an action plan and researcher toolkit.

Research Workshop (Colwyn Bay)

A research workshop was held in Colwyn Bay on 4 March 2025 as part of the HEIF-funded project. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss how the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) relates to the Welsh deaf community and to gather perspectives on barriers, aspirations, and research engagement.

Participants reported very low awareness of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), with none having heard of it despite its ten-year existence. More broadly, they expressed uncertainty about how devolution works, what powers the UN holds, and why qualifications such as a BSL GCSE were not yet available.

Extensive discussion focused on systemic barriers in daily life, including inaccessible public transport announcements, lack of BSL provision in services (health, police, social work, education), and limited access to interpreters. Particular concerns were raised about regional inequalities, with services in North Wales perceived as weaker compared to South Wales and England. Participants also highlighted the decline of deaf clubs and events, and difficulties accessing online and digital services.

Looking forward, participants identified the need for deaf care homes, better conditions for interpreters, expanded adult education opportunities, and improved access to public health services. They also suggested more training for deaf people to take leadership roles in running clubs and community spaces.

Awareness of ongoing research in Wales was low, with participants saying they were generally not informed. They preferred to receive updates through a mixture of channels such as workshops, social media, Zoom/YouTube, email, and post, and emphasised the importance of deaf presenters or deaf translators, particularly for breaking down academic articles into accessible BSL summaries. Concerns about research burden were raised, with calls for regular feedback and updates to encourage continued participation. Participants also showed interest in being involved directly in research through training, mentoring, and shadowing opportunities.

Research Workshop (Haverfordwest)

A community workshop was held in Haverfordwest on 21 March 2025 to gather views from deaf people and professionals in West Wales. The session explored barriers to inclusion, research engagement, and priorities for future action.

Participants showed limited awareness of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), echoing findings from Colwyn Bay. More broadly, there was a sense of frustration that deaf issues in West Wales are rarely recognised or prioritised, with the community feeling overlooked compared to urban centres.

Concerns included poor transport links, limited interpreter availability, and a lack of local services. The closure of deaf clubs was described as having left many people isolated, with older deaf people particularly affected. Participants noted that reliance on online services disadvantages those without digital skills or stable internet connections.

Discussion highlighted mixed views on research. While there was strong interest in being more involved, participants criticised how opportunities are advertised and communicated. They felt researchers often fail to reach grassroots communities, relying too heavily on formal networks.

Participants expressed a desire for stronger local deaf networks, better outreach, and sustained communication. They emphasised that feedback from research must be returned to the community in BSL and that deaf people should play leading roles in setting research priorities.

Feedback Survey

An online feedback survey was circulated following the North and West Wales workshops, generating eight responses (six from North Wales and two from West Wales). The purpose was to assess the relevance, accessibility, and impact of the research workshops, and to gather suggestions for future research dissemination.

Responses were strongly positive. All participants agreed that the information shared was relevant, with seven stating that it reflected their lived experience completely and one

stating somewhat. Six respondents found the presentation fully accessible, while two found it mostly accessible.

Participants expressed clear preferences for how research should be shared in future (see Figure 1).

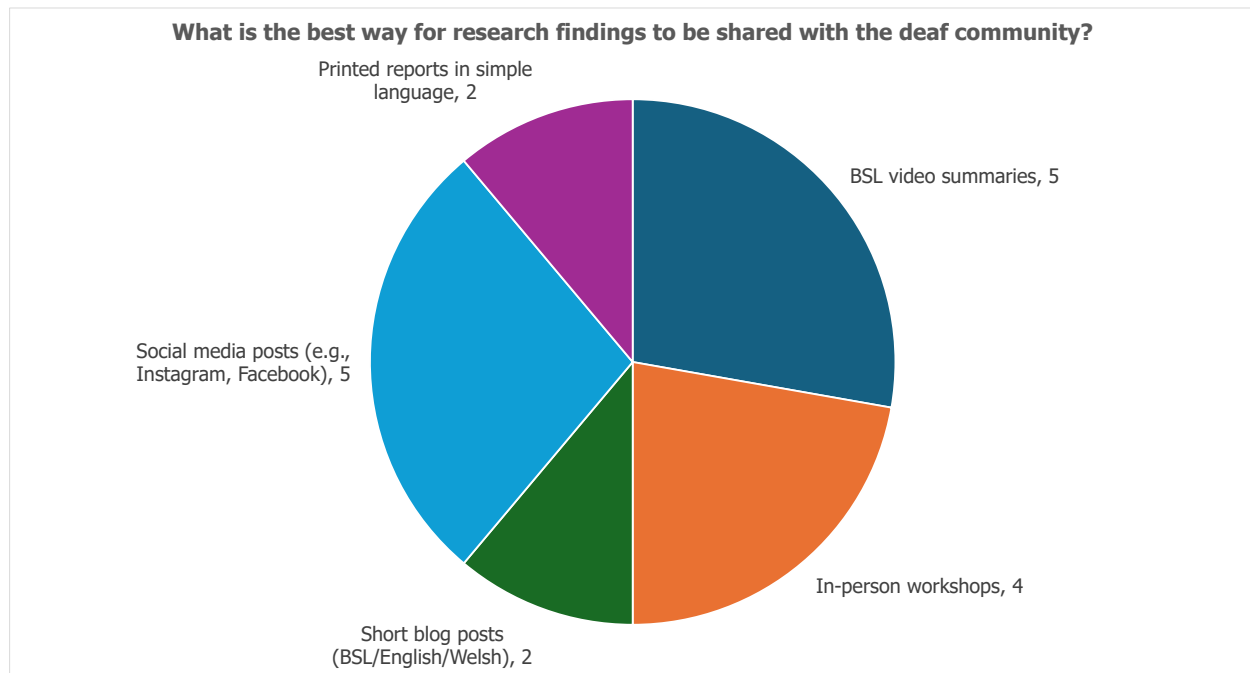


Figure 1

The most popular formats were BSL video summaries (5 responses), social media posts (5 responses, with Facebook and Instagram most often cited), and in-person workshops (4 responses). Smaller numbers highlighted the value of short blog posts in BSL, Welsh, and English (2 responses) and printed reports in simple language (2 responses).

Preferences were split between full academic articles translated into BSL/Welsh (2), short research summaries (2), and a combination of both (4) (see Figure 2).

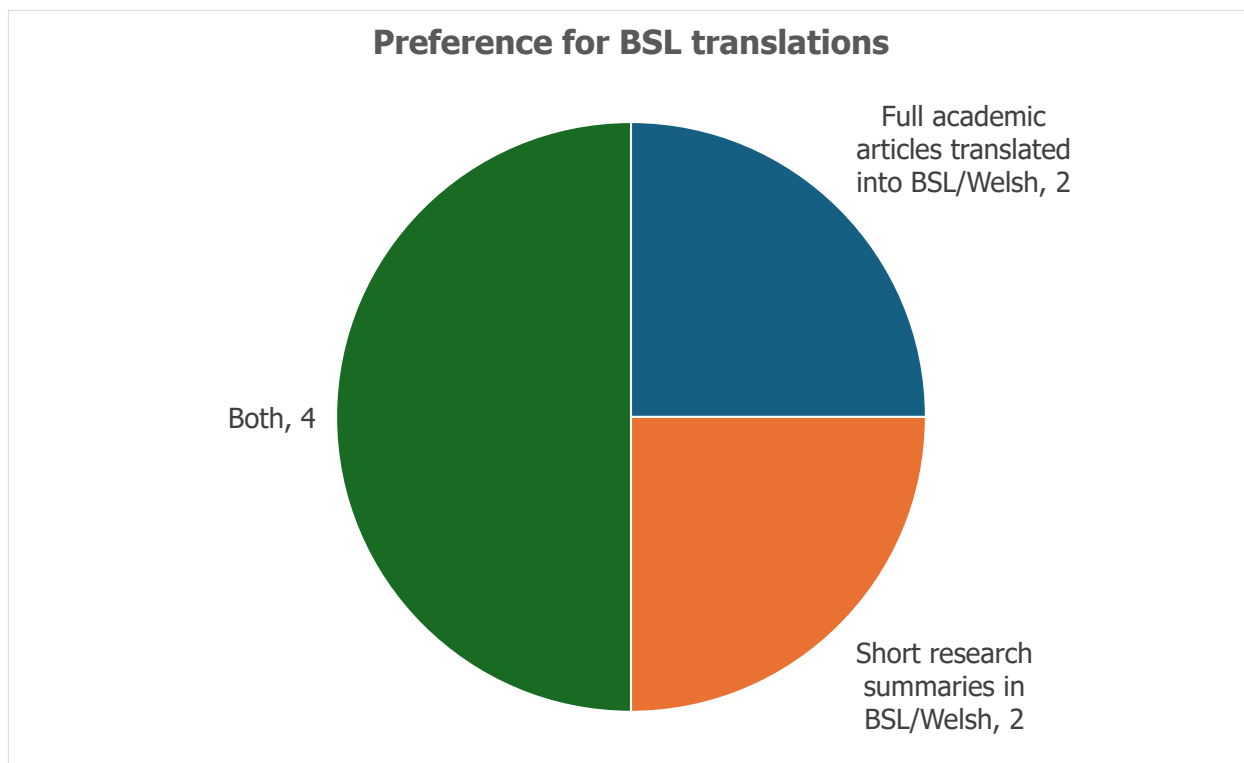


Figure 2

There was strong appetite for ongoing involvement, with seven respondents expressing interest in contributing to future projects. Qualitative comments highlighted a desire for more explanations and training, opportunities for group discussion, and greater use of Facebook for communication.

Themes

The themes presented below were developed through a thematic analysis of feedback collected from community workshops in North, South, and West Wales, together with responses from an online survey. Following Braun and Clarke's (2019) approach, all transcripts and survey comments were coded line by line to identify recurring issues and insights. This process generated a set of codes which were then reviewed, grouped, and refined into broader themes. To ensure that the analysis reflected the lived experiences of deaf people, care was taken to distinguish between contributions from deaf participants

and those from hearing professionals, and to highlight areas where perspectives overlapped or diverged. These five themes form the foundation of the accompanying Toolkit (see Appendix), which translates them into practical principles for researchers.

Respect community time and reduce research burden

Across all engagement activities, participants highlighted a sense of 'research fatigue.' Several described feeling like 'performing monkeys,' asked repeatedly for the same information without seeing results. While the survey confirmed that participants found the information shared relevant, there was frustration that outcomes were not always visible or accessible. To address this, researchers should avoid duplicating data collection, explain clearly why input is needed, and ensure that findings are consistently shared back in BSL, Welsh, and English. Acknowledging contributions, whether through thanks, visibility, or co-authorship, is also vital to show that participants' time and knowledge are valued.

Ensure accessible and deaf-led communication

Accessibility and deaf leadership emerged as key concerns. Participants in Swansea stressed the importance of deaf presenters, rather than relying solely on interpreters. The risks of online-only dissemination were raised, particularly for older deaf people who may be excluded from digital platforms. To respond, researchers should prioritise deaf presenters and translators for community-facing outputs, provide bilingual dissemination in BSL, Welsh, and English, and use multiple channels including social media, workshops, blogs, and email. Offline and face-to-face options remain essential to ensure no one is left behind.

Strengthen participation and co-creation

There was strong appetite for greater involvement in research. The survey found that 87.5% of respondents wanted to contribute to future projects, while participants in Swansea called for training and mentoring to develop more deaf researchers. In Haverfordwest, concerns were raised about how advertising and recruitment processes often fail to reach grassroots communities. Researchers should therefore create

opportunities for deaf people to shape research questions, recruit through trusted networks and personal invitations, and provide mentoring or shadowing experiences to build capacity. Roadshows and workshops across Wales can also help extend participation beyond established centres.

Respect intersectionality and diversity

Engagement revealed that deaf people's experiences are not uniform but shaped by overlapping barriers and identities. Coding highlighted rural neglect, the North–South divide, the needs of older deaf people, those with additional disabilities, and broader issues of intersectionality. Concerns were also voiced about younger deaf people in mainstream schools losing connection to grassroots BSL and community spaces.

Researchers must ensure representation from across Wales, adapt methods for older deaf participants by working through deaf clubs and face-to-face approaches, and take account of additional disabilities. Actively including diverse deaf identities – across ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other intersections – is essential to ensure that research reflects the full breadth of the community.

Build long-term relationships

A recurring concern was that research outcomes rarely find their way back to the community. Swansea participants expressed frustration at this lack of feedback, while the survey showed 87.5% of respondents wanted to remain involved in future projects. This underlines the importance of building long-term relationships rather than treating research as a one-off interaction. Researchers can do this by providing regular updates through blogs, BSL videos, and newsletters; maintaining a visible presence in deaf spaces beyond project timelines; and sharing outcomes in community-friendly ways such as visits to deaf clubs or informal discussions. Crucially, deaf people should be positioned as partners in research, not simply as participants.

Conclusion

This action plan, developed from workshops and survey input across North, South, and West Wales, sets out five clear priorities. By respecting community time, ensuring accessible communication, strengthening participation, recognising diversity, and building long-term relationships, researchers can create more equal, effective, and sustainable engagement with the deaf community in Wales. These five priorities are distilled in the Toolkit (see Appendix) which offers researchers a concise, user-friendly guide to applying these principles in practice.

References

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Appendix – Infographic



GRŴP YMCHWIL
BSL A BYDDAR CYMRU
WALES BSL AND DEAF RESEARCH GROUP

TOOLKIT

How researchers should engage with the Welsh deaf community



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01

Respect community time and reduce research burden

 - Avoid duplication, check existing data first
 - Share findings back promptly in BSL, Welsh and English
 - Value people's contributions through thanks, visibility, co-authorship
- 

02

Ensure accessible and deaf-led communication

 - Prioritise deaf presenters/translators
 - Provide BSL translations and summaries alongside articles
 - Use multiple channels (social media, workshops, email, blogs)
- 

03

Strengthen participation and co-creation

 - Offer opportunities to shape research questions
 - Run workshops/roadshows across Wales
 - Provide mentoring to grow deaf researchers
- 

04

Respect intersectionality and diversity

 - Ensure representation from all regions of Wales
 - Adapt methods for older deaf people (clubs, face-to-face)
 - Make provision for deaf people with additional disabilities
 - Actively include diverse identities
- 

05

Build long-term relationships

 - Provide regular updates (blogs, BSL videos, newsletters)
 - Stay visible in deaf spaces beyond project timelines
 - Share outcomes in community-friendly ways (club visits, informal discussions)
 - Position deaf people as partners, not just participants



UWE Bristol

www.bsl-deaf.wales/toolkit