



## **Response to the Scottish Executive consultation: “A Strategy for Scotland’s Languages”**

SASLI (Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters) welcomes the Scottish Executive’s draft consultation document, “A Strategy for Scottish Languages” and is particularly pleased to see that BSL is given recognition as a “real, full and living language”.

The comments below are given in full support of the Strategy and we wish to continue to support the development of Scotland’s languages through our continuing involvement in the BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group and the Translation and Interpreting and Communication Support Working Group, (TICS).

### **Rationale**

While we agree with the majority of the stated rationale, we would like to question the reasoning behind the decision to take “particular responsibility” for Scots and Gaelic and yet not for Scottish BSL:

1. Unlike spoken languages, BSL is not linked to a core geographical location but to the Deaf Community. It is an indigenous Scottish language in the same way that English BSL, Irish SL and Welsh BSL are indigenous to England, Ireland and Wales respectively.
2. Most of the areas of social and professional life encompassed by the strategy are areas of devolved responsibility.

### **Education**

The focus appears to be heavily weighted towards additional language acquisition. Language does not only enrich education, it is the principal tool that we use to deliver the curriculum. It is one of the cornerstones of cognitive development that will allow our young people today to become the “bright talented and hard working people that will live in Scotland”.



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For deaf pupils who use BSL as their first language and who receive their education through BSL, there is still no curriculum or structure in place to develop their own language skills. In response to a petition last month, the UK parliament have issued a statement explaining that they do not intend to add BSL to the schools curriculum in England. This is another reason why the Scottish Executive should consider taking “particular responsibility” for the language in Scotland and an opportunity for Scotland to lead the way in the UK by developing a BSL curriculum and recruiting native BSL users as teachers of the Deaf.

### **Current Initiatives**

It is encouraging to read about the wide range of initiatives that are currently supported by the Scottish Executive. We hope that the funding available for the TOTS course at Heriot Watt will be backed up by a long term financial commitment in order to meet the target set by Jack McConnell of doubling the number of BSL interpreters in Scotland and to act upon the other recommendations of the BSL and Linguistic Working Group and the Creating Linguistics Access Report to increase the number of personnel.

### **Language Plans**

Given the wide range of policy areas to be potentially covered by the strategy, it might be useful to provide:

1. Training or further guidance on language plans
2. More explicit information about how language planning can be integrated with existing equalities plans for race and disability and what, if any mechanisms there will be for evaluating them.
3. Guidelines and timescales for drawing up and implementing language plans



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4. We understand that the aim of the strategy is to give guidance to public bodies in developing their own language plans and cannot go into detail about specific outcomes. However, we believe that it would be helpful to give more information about “ideal outcomes”; to be more explicit about the overall vision of the Strategy. How will we know if we have been successful, or not?

**Guiding Principles**

1. BSL is unique among other languages in Scotland in that it is legislated for under the DDA (2005) and yet is a modern language. This can cause a lack of clarity about the status of the language. Just as the guiding principles state that “The Scots language will be treated with respect and pride”, we would like to see some explicit mention of BSL in the guiding principles.
2. The principle that states, “Respect for the languages spoken in Scotland will be promoted” and the use of the words “spoken/speakers” throughout the text of the strategy, might be better replaced with the words “used/users” in order to be inclusive of BSL, which is never spoken.
3. In its widest sense, the strategy is related to accessible communication and yet is not an accessible document in itself. Future versions should be presented with a clearer visual layout and structure, as well as more accessible formatting, thus allowing for full access in line with the principles of the DDA (2005).