

British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2023-2029

A Scottish Government Consultation

August 2023

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BSL translation of this document and the consultation are available on the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 website. Please [click here](#) to see the BSL translations.

Ministerial Foreword



Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

British Sign Language (BSL) is a vibrant and important language, with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. It is a language that enables many Scottish Deaf and Deafblind citizens to learn, work, be creative and to make their contribution to our communities, our culture, and our economy. We are committed to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn. But, we recognise that there is more to do to achieve this ambition, and will continue to build to

further promote and support BSL in Scotland.

The BSL National Plan 2017-2023 has delivered a range of actions and produced a strong foundation for us to build on as we embark on the new national plan for BSL in Scotland. Key successes include:

- A comprehensive review of BSL/English interpreting in Scotland, carried out in 2019 – [Landscape Review – BSL Scotland Act 2015](#), which led to the current development of a central booking system for BSL/English interpreters, which is on track to launch in Spring 2024.
- Building evidence on BSL demographics via Scotland's Census 2022 enabling us to use this data to better inform policy decisions.
- Prioritising BSL/English interpreting of the daily Scottish Government's Coronavirus briefings to ensure public health messages were inclusive.
- Queen Margaret University embedding basic BSL tuition in its Initial Teacher Education provision.
- The University of Edinburgh is developing a new Master of Arts in Primary Education and BSL, which will prepare teachers for BSL immersion settings, and for teaching BSL as a language following the 1+2 policy.

To develop Scotland's BSL National Plan 2023-2029, we have established a Short Life Working Group, consisting of organisations representing the deaf, deafblind and BSL communities. I would like to thank the following organisations for their contributions to this group - the British Deaf Association, Deaf Action, Deafblind Scotland, National Deaf Children's Society, Scottish Ethnic Minority Deaf Charity, and the Scottish Sensory Hub (The ALLIANCE). The collective experience from this group will be invaluable as they develop actions for the plan.

To inform the working group's thinking, this consultation asks individuals, organisations and communities to offer their views on what actions are required to advance BSL in Scotland. I am committed to developing a six year strategy that sets the right conditions which will lead to an improved quality of life for deaf and deafblind people who live in Scotland.

Part 1: Consultation

Why We Consult

Consultation is an essential part of the policy making process. It gives us the opportunity to get your opinion and expertise on a proposed area of work. You can find all Scottish Government consultations [online](#). Each consultation goes over the issues under consideration, as well as providing a way for you to give us your views, either online or sending in a video in BSL. After a consultation is closed, we publish all responses where you have given us permission to do so. Responses are analysed and used as part of the policy making process, along with a range of other available information and evidence. Responses to this consultation will help to shape the BSL National Plan 2023-2029

Responding to this Consultation

We are inviting responses to this consultation by 3 September 2023

Please respond to this consultation using the Scottish Government's consultation hub, Citizen Space (<http://consult.gov.scot>). Access and respond to this consultation online at:

<https://consult.gov.scot/equality-and-human-rights/british-sign-language-national-plan-2023-2029>.

You can save and return to your responses while the consultation is still open. Please ensure that consultation responses are submitted before the closing date of 3 September 2023

If you are unable to respond using our consultation hub, please complete the Respondent Information Form to:

BSL Policy Team
Scottish Government
1WR
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh, EH1 3DG

Other Ways to Respond

If you prefer, you can also submit a video in BSL via email to: BSLConsult@gov.scot. Send us an email with YouTube or Vimeo links to videos of your responses. Please do not attach videos to the email as we cannot receive large files, and try to keep all your responses in one video to ensure they are all recorded. You can also send your responses in English by email to BSLConsult@gov.scot or send a hardcopy response by post to: BSL Policy Team, 1WR, St Andrew's House, 2 Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG.

Please ensure that you complete the Respondent Information Form provided in Annex A and attach it alongside your response. The Respondent Information Form lets us know how you wish your response to be handled, and whether you are happy for your response to be made public. It is helpful if you can be clear which question you are responding to so that we can make sure that we take your views into account in the right place.

All BSL video submissions will be sent to Deaf Action for translation into English. Please be aware that whilst personal identification cannot be avoided with BSL submissions, the Scottish Government takes data protection seriously and has measures in place to ensure your data is safe. Your submission will be handled by Scottish Government and translators at Deaf Action, and once the translation has been completed, your submission will be deleted. Any emails and hard copies will be destroyed once they have been processed.

Handling your response

If you respond using the consultation hub, you will be directed to the About You page before submitting your response. Please indicate how you wish your response to be handled and, in particular, whether you are content for your response to be published. If you ask for your response not to be published, we will regard it as confidential, and we will treat it accordingly.

All respondents should be aware that the Scottish Government is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and would therefore have to consider any request made to it under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise.

If you are unable to respond via Citizen Space, please complete and return the Respondent Information Form included in this document.

To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our privacy policy:

<https://www.gov.scot/privacy/>

Next steps in the process

Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public, and after we have checked that they contain no potentially defamatory material, responses will be made available to the public at <http://consult.gov.scot>. If you use the consultation hub to respond, you will receive a copy of your response via email.

Comments and complaints

If you have any comments about how this consultation exercise has been conducted, please send them to the contact address above or at BSLConsult@scot.gov

Scottish Government consultation process

Consultation is an essential part of the policymaking process. It gives us the opportunity to consider your opinion and expertise on a proposed area of work.

You can find all our consultations online: <http://consult.gov.scot>. Each consultation details the issues under consideration, as well as a way for you to give us your views, either online, by email or by post.

Responses will be analysed and used as part of the decision-making process, along with a range of other available information and evidence. We will publish a report of this analysis for every consultation. Depending on the nature of the consultation exercise the responses received may:

- Indicate the need for policy development or review.
- Inform the development of a particular policy.
- Help decisions to be made between alternative policy proposals.
- Be used to finalise legalisation before it is implemented.

While details of particular circumstances described in a response to a consultation exercise may usefully inform the policy process, consultation exercises cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant public body.

Part 2: Introduction

With the introduction of the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, the Scottish Government is committed to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users* to live, work, visit and learn. As part of this commitment, the Scottish Government is introducing the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 to build on the successes of the previous plan, outlined in the progress report which you can view [here](#), and setting new targets for the next six years. This draft plan outlines six priority areas in:

1. BSL Data Strategy
2. BSL Workforce
3. Supporting Deaf Children, Young People and their Families;
4. BSL Accessibility
5. The Promotion of the Heritage and Culture of BSL
6. Social Care and Wellbeing

Each of the priorities has a mix of short-, mid- and long-term goals that we will unpack further in the final write up of the plan, taking into account feedback from this consultation. We understand that our work around BSL will go beyond 2029, and we have set out a range of actions across priority themes that can be achieved within the next six years with a view to continue building on our work beyond 2029. You can view the draft actions in Annex C.

The Scottish Government wants your input to revise the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 ready for publication by 31 October 2023. We hope to understand more about what people, communities and organisations would like to see from the Scottish Government in terms of implementing the actions under key priorities identified by our initial discussions with partner organisations.

We have listened to the feedback around the [2017 BSL National Plan consultation](#), which identified a need for meaningful two-way dialogue with members of the BSL communities who use only BSL in their daily lives. We are working in partnership with key leading organisations with diverse knowledge and networks across the BSL communities of Scotland to deliver accessible, culturally appropriate consultation sessions to ensure that the BSL community can make meaningful contributions. The Scottish Government embeds equality in our approach to policy development. We recognise the diverse needs of all people, including those within the BSL community, and have approached this consultation to make it as inclusive as possible and by targeting specific groups within the BSL community to gather views.

The Scottish Government funds the Contact Scotland BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service, which enables Deaf and Deafblind British Sign Language (BSL) users to telephone, via video relay interpreters, private sector numbers as well as statutory and third sector numbers, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is provided by [Sign Language Interactions \(SLI\)](#) on behalf of the Scottish Government and it offers BSL users the means to communicate in real-time, with services and family and friends. The service is also accessible to Deafblind BSL users, by making use of braille displays.

The Contact Scotland BSL contract is coming up for renewal. We are asking BSL users their opinions of the service so we can make improvements.

***BSL users** refers to people whom BSL is their first or preferred language, including those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss.

Part 3: Summary

Our proposed BSL National Plan for 2023-2029 works towards the purpose of making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn. Our approach has been informed by a wide range of research, analysis and evidence from the lived experience of BSL users in Scotland and organisations representing Deaf BSL users.

The draft actions proposed for the BSL National Plan 2023-29 contains a package of commitments and measures that work together to address the six identified priority areas: BSL data strategy, BSL workforce, support for deaf children, young people and their families, BSL accessibility, the promotion of the heritage and culture of BSL, and social care and wellbeing. The information below summarises each of the priority areas:

- BSL Data Strategy – The Scottish Government recognises the need to develop a sustainable model of obtaining evidence and data around BSL, which will help inform our work within the current and future BSL National Plans.
- BSL Workforce – The Scottish Government recognises the ongoing issues surrounding the shortages in BSL professions such as BSL/English interpreting and BSL tutors in Scotland. By focusing on increasing the number of professionals in these fields, the strategy can help alleviate the shortage and improve access to BSL services for the deaf communities in Scotland.
- Support for deaf children, young people and their families – The Scottish Government recognises that language deprivation in deaf and deafblind children has an impact on their crucial developmental learning in the ages between 0-5 years which can hinder their social, cognitive, and emotional development.
- BSL accessibility – The Scottish Government recognises that the BSL communities are underrepresented across organisations and services in Scotland. We want to promote and develop sustainable approaches to ensure the most impactful work is being carried out to ensure the level of BSL accessibility in Scotland are visible, high quality and widely available.
- Promoting heritage and culture of BSL – The Scottish Government recognises the rich BSL culture that Scotland possesses and the ongoing projects in heritage, culture, and arts across Scotland to represent and celebrate BSL. We are seeking views on how to grow this sector which will bring a host of empowering benefits to the BSL community.
- Social care and wellbeing – The Scottish Government recognises the importance of ensuring that individuals are able to thrive in their daily lives, which includes accessing wellbeing services and receiving the right care for their needs. For the BSL communities, this means being able to receive support in BSL with an understanding of their culture as well as being able to receive information in BSL.

Part 4: Background

Policy Context

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires the Scottish Ministers and public bodies listed in the Act (listed authorities) to publish, and consult on, a draft of their BSL plan, and to use the feedback gathered to inform policy development. The Act is clear that the people consulted are to be those who are likely to be directly affected or otherwise to have an interest in the policy or plan. We are seeking views from those who use BSL, and people or organisations who represent users of British Sign Language in this consultation.

The consultation will be accessible to people who use BSL and who are deaf, or deafblind.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to promote the use of BSL by making provision for the preparation and publication of national and local authority plans. Where a public body has previously published an authority plan, they are required to state how, when and to what extent measures set out by the listed authority were taken. Listed Authorities will continue to review their approach to make improvements in subsequent plans. We anticipate that responses to this consultation will reference listed authority plans or highlight service provision in local communities. We welcome this feedback.

Timeline

October 2015	BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 was published.
March-May 2017	Public consultation on the draft BSL National Plan 2017-2023 was carried out.
October 2017	BSL National Plan 2017-2023 was published.
October 2021	BSL National Plan 2017-2023 Progress Report was published.
June-September 2023	Public consultation on the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029.
October 2023	BSL National Plan 2023-2029 publication.

Respondent Information Form

Please note this form must be completed and returned with your response.

What is your name?

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

- Individual
- Organisation

If you are responding as an individual, please tell us whether you are a BSL user?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to say

If you are responding as an organisation, please select which of the following most closely describes your organisation type?

- Academic/research
- Local Government
- Public Body, including Executive Agencies, NDPBs, NHS etc.
- Representative Body for Professionals
- Third Sector/Deaf Organisation
- Other

If you selected Other, please describe your organisation type:

Organisation's name

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

- Publish response with name
- Publish response only (without name)
- Do not publish response

Information for organisations:

The option '*Publish response only (without name)*' refers only to your name, not your organisation's name. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, the analysis report.

Listed Authorities under the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015

- Audit Scotland.
- The Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland.
- The Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.
- A council constituted under section 2 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.
- A Health Board constituted under section 2(1)(a) of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978.
- The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.
- The Police Investigations and Review Commissioner.
- A body which is a “post-16 education body” for the purposes of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005.
- The Scottish Commission for Human Rights.
- The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service.
- The Scottish Housing Regulator.
- The Scottish Information Commissioner.
- The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.
- The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.
- The Standards Commission for Scotland.

BSL National Plan - Draft Actions

This is a list of draft actions grouped under the key priorities we have set out in the consultation document, which we have discussed with the Short Life Working Group, and are now seeking your views on. Whilst this is subject to change based on the consultation responses, you should refer to these draft actions when you are answering the questions in the consultation.

Supporting deaf children, young people and their families

1. The Scottish Government will investigate and explore an early intervention model for sign language acquisition for deaf and deafblind new-borns and children to ensure they and their families have access to both BSL and English. This will assess existing models to determine if we can build or improve on them. This action will help to ensure that deaf and deafblind babies and children are able to grow and thrive in an environment using the language of their choice.
2. Investigate the provisions of support for deaf and deafblind children within Scotland, and identify any gaps in support to inform an immediate remedial action plan. This includes BSL tuition for deaf and deafblind children and their families.
3. To investigate opportunities for early years workers to learn BSL up to the level of SCQF Level 6 to inform our future work in this area.
4. Support the development of opportunities for deaf and deafblind children, young people, and their families, to learn about the heritage and culture of BSL, especially in Scotland.
5. To establish a BSL Education Advisory Group to inform priorities around access to BSL and teaching of BSL, with initial focus on deaf and deafblind children.
6. To work with the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) to explore and facilitate pathways for BSL users to obtain Qualified Teacher Status.
7. To investigate opportunities for Teachers of the Deaf and teachers working with deaf and deafblind children in obtaining qualifications for BSL up to SCQF Level 10.

Social Care and Wellbeing

8. To explore how the National Care Service co-design involves BSL users, and includes provisions for BSL users.
9. Support Public Health Scotland in the development of guidance around BSL access, including use of BSL/English interpreting support in various formats.

BSL Workforce

10. Investigate opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, support available to them, and skills development, including how to work with BSL/English interpreters.
11. Work with Social Security Scotland to ensure that BSL users continue to provide input into their services in a way that is accessible to them.
12. To explore how a BSL Workforce Strategy alongside a BSL Data Strategy, will consider pathways including, and not limited to, BSL/English interpreting and BSL tutors/teachers.

BSL Data Strategy

13. To explore how a BSL Data Strategy for Scotland would work in practice, including establishing how we will gather data and evidence and distribute this in a way which helps develop sustainable approaches in data gathering around BSL.

BSL accessibility

14. To co-ordinate an effort with listed authorities and BSL/deaf communities within the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 to establish sustainable approaches in the development and implementation of their BSL plans, ensuring that cost-effective work is taking place proportionately within their authorities to help their BSL plans target issues more effectively.
15. To develop a classification framework around British Sign Language, identifying the multiple perspectives including accessibility and as a linguistic minority, and create a guidance in partnership with the See Hear strategy to provide more consistency in approaches to BSL.
16. The Scottish Government will develop guidance on BSL access for public engagement, including quality assurance of BSL translations.

17. Review the BSL accessibility of the Scottish Government website, and work with BSL organisations to ensure a high standard of the accessibility of the website.
18. To consider funding mechanisms for Contact Scotland BSL, and promote the use of this services across the public sector.
19. To support the uptake of SignPort, an online portal for BSL/English interpreter bookings which will be launched for public use, within the Scottish Government and public bodies.
20. The Scottish Government will develop an Implementation Working Group for the BSL National Plan, with the aim of regularly reviewing the National Plan's commitments to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the BSL communities in Scotland throughout the lifetime of this Plan.
21. The BSL Justice Advisory Group will continue to meet, with the aim to regularly review the progress on actions within Justice around BSL and to mainstream BSL into other Justice workstreams.
22. Explore the provision of BSL mediators/intermediaries, also known as intralingual professionals or advocates, for BSL users going through the justice system to inform work to be taken forward to support this provision.
23. Support public bodies within the justice sector in exploring ways in which BSL support can be accessed more efficiently for frontline work and emergency response services.
24. To work with COSLA and the Scottish Parliament to identify existing barriers in support for BSL users within political settings, such as councillor or MSP, and consider ways in which gaps can be addressed, including learning from the 2022 Access to Elected Office Fund.
25. Support the facilitation of BSL support in electoral campaigns and the election process to ensure BSL users are able to make informed decisions with access to all relevant information.

Promotion of the heritage and culture of BSL

26. To work with organisations focusing on BSL within culture and the arts to identify priorities within the BSL communities in Scotland.
27. Explore existing support for organisations with a focus on heritage, culture and the arts – with focus on BSL - across Scotland, to identify ways in which the Scottish Government can support growth for BSL in this sector, in line with the aims and ambitions of A Culture Strategy for Scotland.



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