

British Sign Language

National Plan 2023 to 2029



Introduction



The Scottish Government sees British Sign Language (BSL) as one of the languages of Scotland.

BSL users have a right to equal choices and chances to take part in things and to be fully included.



The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 says we must publish plans every 6 years, showing how we will tell more people about BSL in Scotland and encourage them to use it.

Since the first BSL National Plan was published, we have had a public **consultation** and 43 community consultation events.

A **consultation** is when people are asked what they think about something.

These events helped us to decide what work should be in this plan.



We will start an **Implementation Advisory Group** - this group will check how the work in this plan is going.

We will publish a progress report in 2026 to show if work is going well.

Priority areas – the work we think is most important



We want to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn.

To make this happen we have 10 priority areas in this plan.

Each priority area has **actions** – the work we want to do.

There are 45 actions in the plan.

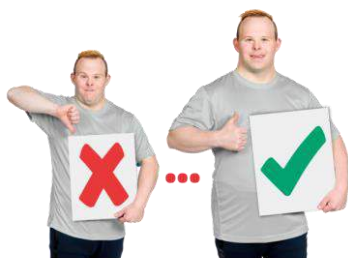
1. Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023 to 2029



The BSL National Plan covers the 6 years from 2023 to 2029.

The Scottish Government commits to the actions in it and we will share what we learn so that life is better for BSL users in Scotland.

Our long-term goal – what we want to have achieved in the future



We want to make life better for BSL users by having BSL in many Scottish Government policies, plans and strategies.

This will help us to find answers to the problems faced by BSL users in their daily lives.

Actions



We will:

1. Start a BSL National Plan Implementation Advisory Group with BSL users on it.
2. Work with **listed authorities** and the BSL community to share what works well and to make the development of BSL local plans better.

Listed authorities are organisations that must follow the law called the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

3. Make **inclusive** communication rules to make sure listed authorities use inclusive communication when communicating with the public.

Inclusive means it works well for everyone.

Any new rules will start in 2025.

4. Develop guidance on using BSL when involving people in the community including how to make sure BSL translations are good quality.

We will share learning with our partner organisation about what works well.

5. Publish a progress report in 2026.

BSL accessibility



The Scottish Government recognises that for **public services** to be accessible for BSL users:

- people should know about the **culture** of BSL

BSL culture means it has its own behaviours, art, history and values

- important information should be available in BSL
- people must be able to get services using BSL



Public services are services we all use like schools, hospitals and councils.

The experiences of BSL users is supporting us to decide how we deliver services across Scotland.

Our long-term goal



To make sure services are accessible for BSL users and knowing the importance of:

- having accessible information in at the right time
- using technology
- making sure more people know about ways to communicate

Actions



We will:

6. Improve the accessibility of the Scottish Government website for BSL users.
7. Make sure deaf and deafblind BSL users are included in the See Hear **strategy**.

A **strategy** is a large plan.

Make sure the BSL National Plan works to make sure people who use BSL can access all services.

8. Continue to promote the use of [Contact Scotland BSL](#), Scotland's BSL online interpreting service.

Make this service better and make sure it meets the needs of BSL users.

9. Start **SignPort** and promote its use.

SignPort is an online way to book BSL/English interpreters which will start in the Scottish Government and other public bodies in Spring 2024.

Public bodies are organisations that work for the Government and provide public services.

Children, young people and their families



Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) is our commitment to give all children, young people, and their families the right support at the right time.

We want to make Scotland the best place to grow up in.

There must be a clear way for deaf and deafblind children to:



- have the right support to use BSL at each stage in their education
- be the best they can be at school

Parents who use BSL will be fully involved in their child's education.

Our long-term goal



A deaf or deafblind child and their family will be offered the right information and support at the right time to use BSL.



We will have stronger partnerships between organisations to make sure it is easy for BSL users and deaf/deafblind children to get the support they need at all stages of their learning.

Actions



We will:

10. Build partnerships and good working relationships between NHS teams and BSL providers to make sure deaf and deafblind children and their families get the right support from early childhood.

11. Work with organisations across Scotland to have a network of BSL providers.

12. Work with staff from these groups to help them understand the importance of BSL provision on child and family wellbeing:

- midwifery
- health visiting
- family nurse partnership
- **allied health professionals** like:
 - **physiotherapists** who help people stay strong, active and mobile
 - and **speech and language therapists** who help people with conversations and difficulties with swallowing food and fluids
- **audiology** – support with hearing difficulties





13. Support NHS teams and BSL providers to make **referral pathways** so deaf and deafblind children can get the healthcare and language learning support they need.

A **referral pathway** is the way someone is linked with a service they need.



14. Included the needs of deaf and deafblind people in the information we gave to the Independent Review of Audiology Services in Scotland in August 2023.



15. Continue to support education authorities who give and check services for pupils with additional support needs, including those who are deaf.

Families can get information from [Enquire](#) - the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning, online by calling: 0345 123 2303



16. Support ways for early years workers to learn BSL up to Level 6.

17. Support ways for teachers working with deaf and deafblind children and young people to learn BSL up to Level 10.



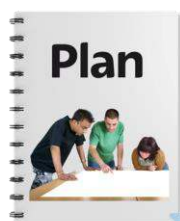
18. Work with the General Teaching Council Scotland to look at ways for BSL users to get Qualified Teacher Status.



19. Make education an important part of the work of the Implementation Advisory Group, to look at access to BSL and the teaching of BSL.



20. Develop and support ways for deaf and deafblind children, young people, and their families, to learn about the history and culture of BSL, especially in Scotland.



21. Make Scotland's first National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy.

This will make sure organisations work together to support all disabled young people to have a positive move to adult life.

The Scottish Government BSL Policy team will make sure the experiences of BSL users are included in the development of the strategy.

Access to employment



[No One Left Behind](#) is our plan for **employability** support in Scotland.

Employability means help getting a job.

Everyone should get the right advice and support to decide what job is right for them.

Our long-term goal



BSL users will get support to:

- develop their skills
- find the right route to employment
- get a job
- be the best they can be
- progress in their job

Actions



We will:

22. Develop ways for deaf and deafblind young people to:

- learn about getting a job
- learn about what a workplace will be like
- understand the support they can get including how to work with BSL/English interpreters
- develop their skills



23. Deliver employability services that support people to get and keep a job.

We will work with the Implementation Advisory Group to find ways to make it easier for BSL users to get employability support.

Health and Wellbeing



The law says that patients who are BSL users must be able to get the same health and social care access as hearing patients, in their first or preferred language.

NHS Scotland has an interpreting, communication support and translation policy that supports people to:

- fully take part in their care
- say what they need
- feel understood
- have the information they need to make decisions



This makes their healthcare experience better.

Our long-term goal



BSL users can get the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make choices at every stage of their lives.

Actions



We will:

24. Develop health as an important part of the Implementation Advisory Group's work to:

- find what make it difficult for people to get health services
- develop ways to make this better



25. Make sure that BSL users are part of the development of the National Care Service.

26. Work with our partners to use and check our mental health standards.

This will include making sure information and services are accessible to everyone.



27. Improve equality, inclusion and diversity training for the mental health and wellbeing workforce, including promoting BSL training to the workforce.



28. Promote and support the learning of BSL as a second language for hard of hearing, deafened people and people at risk of a **second sensory loss**.

A **second sensory loss** means a person could be also losing their sight.



29. Use the learning from projects like Deafblind Scotland's BSL Café Project that supports people who are at risk of a second sensory loss by teaching them BSL.



30. Build on the work in the [social isolation and loneliness strategy](#) to:

- include actions about BSL users
- link with local and national work to have less **social isolation** and loneliness, including how people get services and go to projects

Social isolation is when someone has little or no contact with other people.

Celebrating BSL culture



More needs to be done to support equal chances to get and develop a career in the cultural and creative sectors.

Creative Scotland is the organisation that supports the arts, screen and creative industries in Scotland.

They promote equal choices and chances to create and take part.

Our long-term goal



BSL users:

- will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland
- will have equal chances to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts
- are encouraged to share BSL and deaf culture with the people of Scotland

Actions



We will:

31. Work with Creative Scotland to help make sure BSL is an important part of culture and the arts in Scotland.



32. Make sure BSL users can take part in culture and the arts in every way.

33. Support BSL organisations to celebrate BSL culture and heritage to:

- make the community stronger
- share their rich and vibrant culture
- feel more widely valued in society

We will explore opportunities for children and young people:

- to develop a secure sense of **identity** - how they see themselves
- have less loneliness and social isolation
- to have deaf **role models**

A **role model** is someone you look up to because they are a good example.

34. Find ways for the Scottish Government to support more growth for BSL in the heritage, culture and the arts sector.

Promote work we are already doing, that follows the aims and ambitions of [A Culture Strategy for Scotland](#).

BSL data – facts, figures and information



There has been a lot of work in education and voluntary organisations to get data about BSL users, deaf and deafblind people.

We need more data on BSL users in Scotland.

Our long-term goal



To get better data on BSL users in Scotland and use it when we make decisions about public services so they give people what they need.

Actions

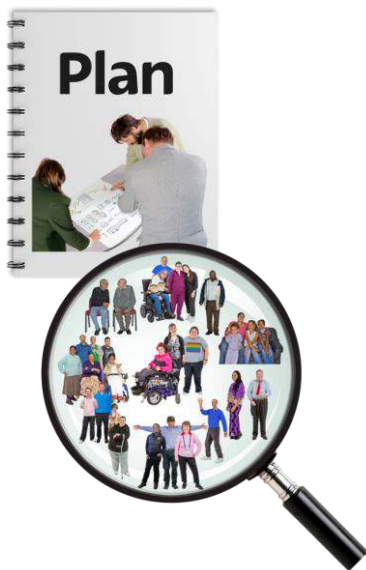


We will:

35. Work with BSL organisations to:
- find out what data they already have
 - understand what makes it difficult to get data and information
 - agree on what data is missing



36. Get data from projects funded by the Scottish Government's Equality and Human Rights Fund.



37. Develop and start a plan for BSL data to set out:

- how we will better understand the BSL community in Scotland relating to:
 - **demographics** – like their age, sex and race
 - language and words used
- look at accessibility and access to services

Transport



Transport Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework for Scotland supports disabled people's rights by improving access to travel.

BSL users, particularly those who are deaf and deafblind, should have access to the right information at the right time to make public transport accessible for them.

Our long-term goal



BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland.

Actions



We will:

38. Work with Transport Scotland, using the principles of the Accessible Travel Framework, to make transport services better for BSL users.

39. Work with Scotland's rail, ferry, air and bus operators to make public transport more accessible for BSL users.

Access to Justice



Access to justice means being treated fairly by the law, and having access to police, courts and organisations that give legal advice and support.

We must be able to have and use our rights so we live in a fair society.

Our long-term goal



BSL users will have fair and equal access to the justice systems in Scotland.

Actions



We will:

40. Keep working work with the BSL Justice Advisory Group to:

- regularly check if work on the actions about BSL are going well
- make sure BSL is part of other Justice work



41. Have more BSL advocates for BSL users going through the justice system.



42. Support public bodies to find ways to make it easier to get BSL support for justice work and emergency response services.

Democratic participation – getting involved in politics and making decisions by voting



Make sure public services give people what they need to make their lives better.

Big changes are needed to the ways that policies and services are developed and put in place.

Our long-term goal



BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland:

- as citizens
- as voters
- as elected politicians
- as **board members** of our public bodies



Board members look at the work an organisation is doing and check it is working well.

Actions



We will:

43. Make information that supports BSL users to take part in democratic life.

44. Work with COSLA and the Scottish Parliament to find what makes it difficult for BSL users to get support in politics for example when they want to be a councillor or MSP.



Find ways to make this better including using what we have learned from the Access to Elected Office fund.



45. Make sure there is BSL support in election campaigns and the election process.



This will make sure BSL users have all the information they need so they can make decisions.