

BSL (Scotland) Act 2015

Scottish Deaf BSL Community: Summary of Progress being made with Local Authorities' BSL Plans through BSL Roadshows

February 2022



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Equality and
Human Rights



DEAF ASSOCIATION SCOTLAND
COMANN NAM BODHAR ALBA

BDA Scotland would like to thank the Scottish Deaf community for their contributions on the progress of their local BSL plans, which are reported in this document.

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BDA Scotland
www.bda.org.uk

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I. Introduction

BDA Scotland prepared this summary report, in relation to the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, following engagement with **63 Deaf and Deafblind BSL users** across Scotland. The information presented here formed part of the British Deaf Association Scotland's progress report on the BSL National Plan, which was published in August 2021. See <http://bslscotlandact2015.scot/summaries-progress/> for the BSL and English versions.

For this report, BDA Scotland collated feedback and views from **Scottish Deaf community members, including Deafblind BSL users**, about their access to Local Authorities, to help to demonstrate the current state of access for **Deaf and Deafblind BSL users**, as of September 2021. BDA Scotland hosted a total of seven Roadshow events on Zoom (due to pandemic restrictions) between February and July 2021.

- **North of Scotland and Islands** (Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Western Isles, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland)
- **South of Scotland** (Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, Scottish Borders, South Ayrshire)
- **Scottish Ethnic Minority Deaf Club (SEMDC)**
- **Deafblind Scotland**
- **West of Scotland** (East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire)
- **East of Scotland** (Dundee, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Perth & Kinross, West Lothian)
- **Central Scotland** (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Fife, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling)



Progress Report 2021 Roadshow

BSL Scotland Act logo and Zoom logo.

BDA Scotland are working with the Scottish Government. We want your views and feedback on the BSL Plans in Scotland for the BSL Progress Report in October 2021.

Speakers: Frankie McLean (BSL Policy Officer), Helen Morgans-Wenhold (Coordinator), James Barless-Miller (BSL User).

Location	Date/Time
Islands and the North of Scotland: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands	Thursday, 18 February at 10am
The South of Scotland: Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, Scottish Borders, South Ayrshire	Saturday, 6 March at 11am
The West of Scotland: East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire	Tuesday, 11 May at 2pm
The East of Scotland: Dundee City, East Lothian, Edinburgh City, Midlothian, Perth & Kinross, West Lothian	Saturday, 5 June at 11am
The Central of Scotland: Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Fife, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling	Tuesday, 13 July at 2pm

Please book your space and you will receive a Zoom invitation.

These meetings are for **BSL Users only**

Contact: Helen Morgans-Wenhold for more information
Email: hco.scot@bda.org.uk
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The BDA stands for Deaf Equality, Access and Freedom of Choice

Logos for Scottish Government, BDA, and BSL Scotland Act.

2. Findings

Here we present views and feedback from the Scottish Deaf community, including Deafblind BSL users, regarding access to Local Authorities, framed around a series of questions which were asked at each event.

I. Are you aware of your local public bodies' BSL Plans?

Yes	29 (46%)	No	34 (54%)
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a. Do you feel public bodies have engaged effectively with the BSL community in setting their plans?

Participants:

- had been involved in initial consultations about their **Local Authority's BSL plans** but had not heard from councils since.
- felt that NHS Boards had made **better progress** than councils.
- wanted to see more **inclusion of tactile BSL** in the BSL plans.
- had received emails from their councils regarding BSL plans, but **communication** had not been frequent; some had heard nothing at all.
- offered to help with the plans but there was **no further action** from councils.

It was suggested that councils and NHS Boards **should work together in shared meetings** with the Scottish Deaf community, including Deafblind BSL users, as this **would reduce the amount of time** people would have to commit to consultation and engagement.

A few councils experienced a **high staff turnover**, which led to contacts being dropped and progress stalling.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** made it difficult for councils to continue to progress this work as planned.

b. If you were involved in discussion of a local plan, have you seen action taking place following that?

Participants reported that there had been **a lack of action** by some councils, and in some areas, if there had been any progress, news of this **had not been shared** with community members.

See **Recommendations** on Page 9: 1, 2, 5 and 6

Findings (Cont'd)

2. Since the National Plan was published in 2017, have you experienced an improvement in services which you think should be promoted more widely?

Participants:

- highlighted examples of **Deaf BSL users being employed** in high profile roles, i.e., staff responsible for BSL in the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, at the University of Edinburgh, and in numerous public bodies. They believe this results in **a culture change within organisations** and would like to see more Deaf BSL users recruited to similar positions.
- were now routinely being offered **the option of a preferred BSL/English interpreter** and highlighted this as an example of good practice.
- reported good experiences with **tactile BSL/English interpreting support provision**.
- appreciated having the **VRS service** and were pleased to note public bodies **promoting the use of this service**.

There seems generally to be **better awareness of Deaf people's needs and more BSL awareness** across local public bodies.

BSL/English interpreters accompanied the First Minister for all COVID-19 briefings, increasing **visibility and ensuring access**.

See **Recommendations** on Page 9: 3 and 4

3. What is still not working well for BSL users in Scotland? Can you give us examples?

Participant suggested:

- Councils need **to improve their communication**, follow up after initial consultations, and express a greater willingness to engage.
- Deaf and Deafblind BSL users need **to become more confident** in taking part in consultation and providing feedback about their experiences to the local public bodies' services.
- There are **not enough qualified BSL/English interpreters available** who are skilled in jargon-specific settings such as medicine, legal and other areas.
- Some council staff and Deaf BSL users might struggle **to use the VRS service**. Contact Scotland BSL could offer one-to-one training for people who do not know how to use their service.
- **Council websites** are not accessible, either because BSL resources are not available or because they are too difficult to navigate.

Findings (Cont'd)

- Access for BSL users is **rarely factored into council budgets**.
- There are still gaps in terms of **access to BSL within education** for both Deaf and hearing children. There is a need for more Deaf BSL tutors/teachers, and Deaf role models within educational settings.
- **Complaint and compliment procedures** are too difficult to locate on websites and the information is primarily provided only in written English.
- There is a need to **include tactile BSL and Deafblind awareness** within general BSL/English interpreter training, so more BSL/English interpreters are skilled in tactile BSL.
- There is not enough support in Scotland for hearing families who want **to learn BSL** to support their Deaf children.

See **Recommendations** on Page 9: 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6

4. While BSL Plans for the next three years will remain mostly similar:

a. What would you like to see prioritised locally regarding BSL in the future?

Participants said they would like to see councils:

- **go to local Deaf clubs or centres** so that Deaf community members can share their feedback about council services more easily, in a familiar environment.
- **follow the good example** of NHS Boards and undertake direct engagement to improve Deaf BSL users' access to their services.
- **learn skills as well as raise awareness** in topics such as basic communication, with the support of Deafblind Scotland's tailored guide communicator training.
- **employ Deaf staff members** who use BSL, dedicated to progressing BSL plans.
- **set up BSL forums** with more Deaf and Deafblind BSL users participating.

b. What would you like to see prioritised nationally regarding BSL in the future?

Participants suggested:

- **More opportunities** for Deaf community members, including themselves, to become empowered, and gain the confidence and knowledge to deliver effective feedback to services and get involved in trying to make improvements.
- **Engagement** should become more of a two-way street, with councils returning to share what they have done.
- **Greater employment** of Deaf and Deafblind BSL users, as this could help to influence general workplace culture and bring about positive changes within public bodies.
- **Fee consistency** for interpreting services - some interpreting agencies charge the same fee for tactile BSL interpreting, others charge a premium.
- Contact Scotland BSL should **promote their service** widely and getting public bodies to put details on their websites.

Findings (Cont'd)

- More information and resources should **be translated by Deaf translators**.
- Deaf children and young people should have **effective access in BSL to their education** in Scotland and hearing children should be offered BSL as one of their 1+2 language options. Having BSL schools in Scotland would be better for Deaf children.
- **Access to Deaf role models** who use BSL would benefit both Deaf and hearing children would help to improve awareness.

See **Recommendations** on Page 9: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

5. What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had on you with regards to your local BSL plans?

Positive Impacts described by participants:

- **An increase in BSL translation work** over the last 18 months.
- **An increase in the use of and promotion** of the Contact Scotland BSL service.
- **Having BSL/English interpreters on screen** along with the First Minister – this gave Deaf BSL users equal access to the Scottish Government COVID-19 briefings.
- **Improved access to information** throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with regular updates and BSL summaries from BDA Scotland and updates from Deafblind Scotland offering further useful options.

Negative Impacts described by participants:

- The pandemic has had a **negative impact on engagement work** in relation to BSL local plans.
- **Not all councils** made COVID-19 information available in BSL.
- **There was a delay in access to COVID-19 information** because BSL translations were released a considerable time after English versions.
- Deafblind participants **cannot access information visually**. They had to rely on guide communicators to physically translate the BSL videos in tactile BSL.
- Councils insisted on the **use of Microsoft Teams rather than Zoom** – this is a less accessible platform for Deaf BSL users.
- BSL teachers and BSL Awareness trainers **have struggled to work** during the COVID-19 pandemic, as face-to-face training was not possible.

See **Recommendations** on Page 9: 2 and 6

3. Recommendations

1	Empowerment training	Local Authorities would learn to be confident in working with BSL users in promoting the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.
2	BSL Awareness training	Local Authorities should receive BSL Awareness training. They would learn how to provide BSL access at workplace and local events. They could lead by example in promoting the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.
3	BSL Roadshows	Local Authorities should be provided with information on BSL issues annually by BDA Scotland, who would meet with local BSL users or working groups every quarter.
4	Ongoing funding for delivery of actions for BSL Authority Plan and BSL translation work	Local Authorities should provide BSL access on their websites and Facebook pages, and at local events. Any translation work to camera should be presented by Deaf BSL users.
5	Engagement	Local Authorities should reach out to their local Deaf communities and attend BSL events, clubs, or consultation events.
6	Commitment	Local Authorities should engage with their local Deaf communities. They should employ BSL users to promote BSL Authority Plans and lead good working practices.

4. Conclusions

Based on the recommendations above, BDA Scotland plan to provide support for both BSL users and for Local Authorities in Scotland in the following ways:

- **Building bridges for direct engagement**
- **Providing empowerment training**
- **Setting up BSL forums**
- **Providing a BSL helpline**

BDA Scotland will signpost Deaf people to appropriate services and support via a helpline. This will give Deaf BSL users the opportunity to seek information and resolve issues independently.

5. The British Deaf Association

The BDA stands for **D**eaf **E**quality, **A**ccess and **F**reedom of choice

Vision

Our vision is Deaf people fully participating and contributing as equal and valued citizens in wider society.

Mission

Our Mission is to ensure a world in which the language, culture, community, diversity and heritage of Deaf people in the UK is respected and fully protected, ensuring that Deaf people can participate and contribute as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. This will be achieved through:

- Improving the quality of life by empowering Deaf individuals and groups;
- Enhancing freedom, equality and diversity;
- Protecting and promoting BSL and ISL.

Values

The BDA is a Deaf people's organisation representing a diverse, vibrant and ever-changing community of Deaf people. Our activities, promotions, and partnerships with other organisations aim to empower our community towards full participation and contribution as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. We also aim to act as guardians of BSL and ISL.

- 1. Protecting our Deaf culture and Identity** – we value Deaf peoples' sense of Deaf culture and identity derived from belonging to a cultural and linguistic group, sharing similar beliefs and experiences with a sense of belonging.
- 2. Asserting our linguistic rights** – we value the use of BSL and ISL as a human right. As such, BSL and ISL must be preserved, protected and promoted because we also value the right of Deaf people to use their first or preferred language.
- 3. Fostering our community** – we value Deaf people with diverse perspectives, experiences and abilities. We are committed to equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination with a special focus on those affecting Deaf people and their language.
- 4. Achieving equality in legal, civil and human rights** – we value universal human rights such as the right to receive education and access to information in sign language, and freedom from political restrictions on our opportunities to become full citizens.
- 5. Developing our alliance** – we value those who support us and are our allies because they share our vision and mission, and support our BSL and ISL community.

About the British Deaf Association

Founded in 1890, the British Deaf Association (BDA) is a national Deaf-led organisation that works directly with Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL). Our work concentrates on campaigning for equal rights on a national level and working at a local level empowering Deaf people to achieve access to their local public services. This is carried out through projects delivering individual and community advocacy.

We also work to ensure BSL/ISL is included by public bodies by delivering a public commitment through signing the BSL and ISL Charter.

Our Board of Trustees are all Deaf (we use the capitalised 'D' to denote the fact that we have a separate language and culture), and, 80% of our staff are Deaf.

Many Deaf people who use BSL/ISL lack access to education, health services, employment and other public services. Our work is designed to empower Deaf people and to improve access to general information and public services. We seek to achieve this by working with Deaf people at the local level through setting up forums to lobby public bodies and supporting Deaf people individually.

This is in line with the overall BDA objectives, which are: **D**eaf **E**quality, **A**ccess and **F**reedom of choice.

For a list of signatories to our BSL and ISL Charter, FAQs, and other information, including what the BDA can do for your organisation, please look at our website: www.bda.org.uk





www.bda.org.uk | bda@bda.org.uk

The BDA stands for **D**eaf **E**quality, **A**ccess and **F**reedom of Choice

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