



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot







Scottish Government  
British Sign Language (BSL)  
**National Plan**  
2017-2023



# Our ten long-term goals



## Contents

-  Ministerial Foreword
-  Executive Summary
-  Scottish Public Services
-  Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare
-  School Education
-  Post-School Education
-  Training, Work and Social Security
-  Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing
-  Transport
-  Culture and The Arts
-  Justice
-  Democracy

**The BSL National Plan has ten long-term goals. These goals represent our collective ambition for BSL in Scotland.**

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.



**Mark McDonald MSP**

Minister for Childcare  
and Early Years

## Introduction

I am Mark McDonald, MSP for Aberdeen Donside and Minister for Childcare and Early Years. As the Scottish Minister with responsibility for British Sign Language (BSL), I am delighted to introduce Scotland's first BSL National Plan, which I am confident will make a difference to the lives of D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users across Scotland.

Throughout the plan, we refer to 'BSL users'. This covers all people whose first or preferred language is BSL, including those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss.

BSL is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary. It has its own dialects and rich variation. Most importantly, it is a language which enables many of our D/deaf and Deafblind citizens to learn, work, parent, be creative, live life to the full, and to make their contribution to our communities, our culture and our economy.

“

”

**The Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit.**

Over the last 18 months, members of the BSL National Advisory Group (NAG) have been working together to help develop Scotland's BSL National Plan. The NAG is made up of D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users and parents with D/deaf children, working alongside representatives of public bodies which will have to implement the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. I am grateful to the members of the NAG for sharing their valuable time, commitment, expertise and advice as we have worked together to produce Scotland's BSL National Plan, the first in the UK.

This plan covers the whole of the Scottish Government and over 50 national public bodies that Scottish Ministers have responsibility for. Other public bodies, including local authorities, regional NHS boards, colleges and universities will publish their own BSL plans, by October 2018.

The BSL National Plan has ten long-term goals. These goals represent our collective ambition for BSL in Scotland. But we know it will take longer than six years to reach these goals.

So this plan sets out the actions we think we can realistically achieve in the next three years. We will then publish a national progress report in 2020, with a further set of actions we will deliver before the end of the plan in 2023. Future plans, which will build on our progress, will be shaped by national initiatives and

the priorities of BSL users. These plans will be published every six years taking us even closer to our long-term goals.

The Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit. This means that D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users will be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives. I firmly believe that this, our first BSL National Plan, will help us to make substantial progress towards that ambition.

So let's work together to make a positive difference in Scotland, celebrating the value, richness and diversity that BSL and those who use it contribute to our country.



**Mark McDonald MSP**

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Executive Summary

**The Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users\* to live, work and visit. This means that people whose first or preferred language is BSL will be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens, and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.**

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public bodies in Scotland to publish plans every six years, showing how they will promote and support BSL. This is our first BSL National Plan and it covers the Scottish Government and

over 50 national public bodies that Scottish Ministers have responsibility for. Other public bodies, including local authorities, regional NHS boards, colleges and universities will publish their own BSL plans next year.



The BSL National Plan sets out ten long-term goals for BSL in Scotland, covering early years and education; training and work; health, mental health and wellbeing; transport; culture and the arts; justice and democracy. It describes 70 actions Scottish Ministers will take by 2020 to make progress towards these goals, including:

- improving access to a wide range of information and public services in BSL;
- removing the barriers that prevent BSL users\* from becoming teachers;
- investigating the level of BSL of teachers and support staff in schools;
- developing Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) awards in BSL;
- enabling parents who use BSL to be fully involved in their child's education;
- expanding the teaching of BSL as a language to hearing pupils in schools;
- improving the experience of students who use BSL, when they move from school to college, university, training and the world of work;
- improving access to health care and mental health services in BSL;

- ensuring that every Scottish Government funded employment and training opportunity is accessible to BSL users\*, and that they are properly supported;
- building the skills of qualified BSL/English interpreters to work in specialist settings like health, mental health and justice; and
- removing obstacles to BSL users\* participating in politics and public life, for example by promoting our Access to Elected Office Fund which can meet the costs of BSL interpreters for people wishing to stand for election in the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections.

The plan was developed with the active participation of D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users who worked with public bodies as part of the BSL National Advisory Group.

We will publish a progress report in 2020, with a further set of actions we will deliver by 2023. Future plans – which will build on our progress, will take us even closer to our ten long-term goals.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

# Scottish Public Services

---

**Our long-term goal:**  
**Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users\*.**

**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

## **01**

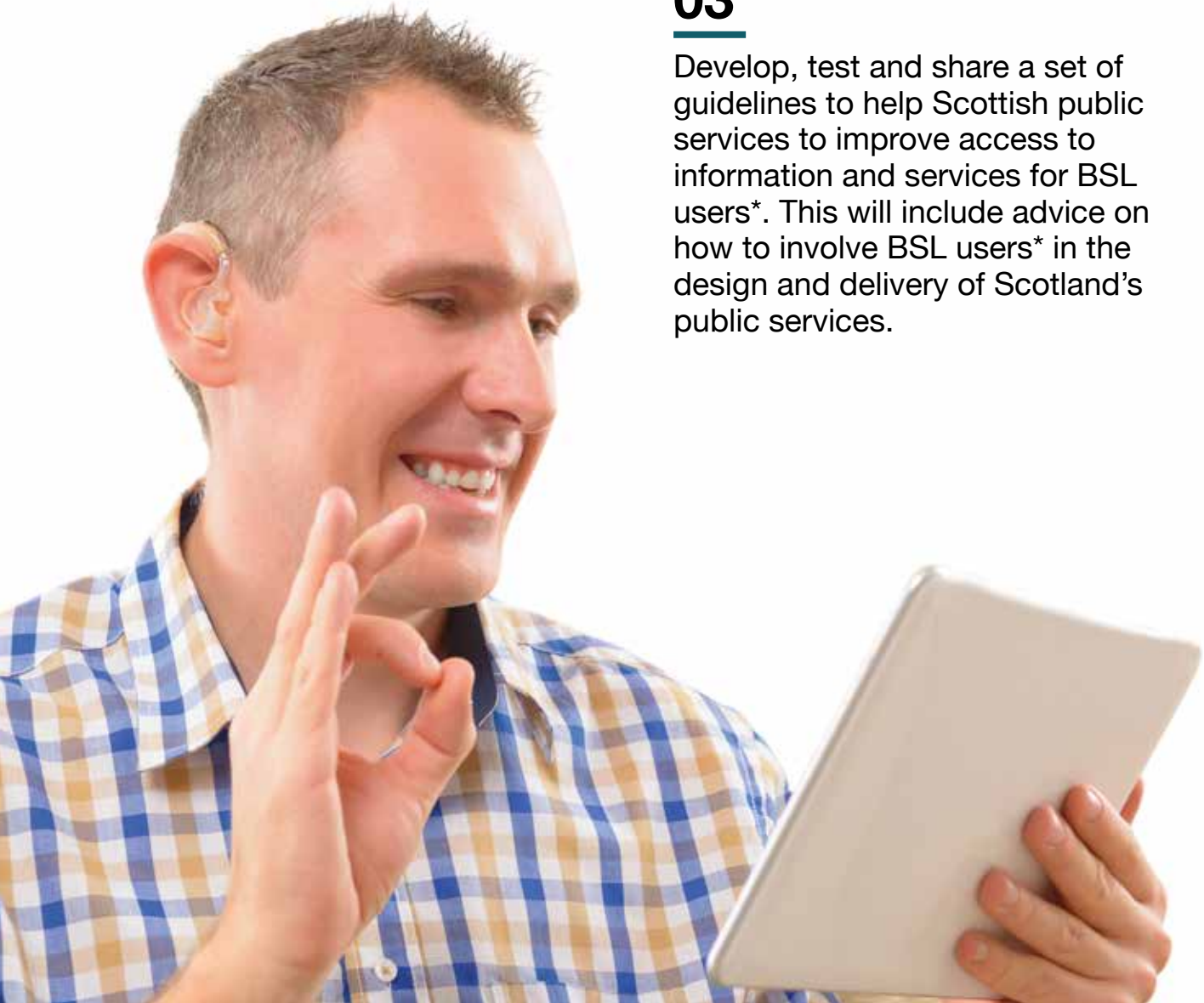
Develop and test a new question on the use of BSL in Scotland for potential inclusion in Scotland's Census 2021. This will give us a more accurate profile of Scotland's BSL users\*.

## **02**

Analyse existing evidence and gather further data about BSL, so that we can establish baselines and measure how we are making progress.

## **03**

Develop, test and share a set of guidelines to help Scottish public services to improve access to information and services for BSL users\*. This will include advice on how to involve BSL users\* in the design and delivery of Scotland's public services.







## **04**

Work with BSL users\* to agree and begin a programme of work to increase the accessibility of the 'mygov.scot' website. This website enables citizens to access a range of public information and services online.

## **05**

Promote the use of the Scottish Government's nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service (VRS) called 'contactSCOTLAND-BSL', which allows BSL users\* to contact public and third sector services and for these services to contact them, and explore the potential for its greater use.

## **06**

Encourage public bodies to access BSL awareness training for staff who may work with BSL users\*, and signpost to appropriate training.

## **07**

Review a range of current and on-going Scottish and UK evidence about the BSL/English interpreting landscape (for example the UK Market Review of BSL and communication provision, and the Scottish Government funded review of the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI)).

## **08**

Analyse the learning from actions we are taking forward in health, education and justice (referred to in this plan) to strengthen Scotland's interpreting profession.

## **09**

Consider what further work is needed to ensure that a strong and skilled pool of BSL/English interpreters are working efficiently across Scotland.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare

---

### **Our long-term goal:**

**The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a D/deaf or Deafblind child and their family offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL.**





**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

**10**

Improve access to early years services for parents whose child is diagnosed as D/deaf or Deafblind by developing information about BSL and Deaf culture for service providers who support parents, such as health visitors.

**11**

Assist families of D/deaf and Deafblind children by ensuring that they have access to BSL resources as early as possible in their child's life. This will include consulting with BSL users\* and other stakeholders to assess the most appropriate digital platforms for signposting and disseminating information.

**12**

Develop BSL resources and advice within key programmes such as 'BookBug' so that parents can be supported to interact with their child during this critical developmental phase.

**13**

Work with partners to determine the best way of enabling families and carers to learn BSL so that they can communicate effectively with their D/deaf or Deafblind child in the crucial early years (0-8 years).

**14**

Test out a new approach to supporting older D/deaf and Deafblind children (8 years +) and young people, and their families to learn BSL.

**15**

Ensure that children and/or parents/carers who use BSL can benefit from the new £2m Inclusion Fund, as part of the increase in early learning and childcare provision.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## School Education

### Our long-term goal:

**Children and young people who use BSL will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child's education; and more pupils will be able to learn BSL at school.**

**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

**16**

Work with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) to remove barriers that make it difficult for BSL users\* to become registered teachers.

**17**

Undertake additional investigations into the level of BSL held by teachers and support staff working with D/deaf and Deafblind pupils in schools.



\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## **18**

Work with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) to review the guidance it provides to teachers of pupils who use BSL.

## **19**

Work with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to develop an initial suite of awards in BSL, which will form the basis for any future development of BSL qualifications up to Level 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

## **20**

Work with Education Scotland to share advice and examples of good practice for education professionals and support staff about how to engage effectively with parents who use BSL.

## **21**

Work with BSL users\* to develop information and advice about how parents who use BSL can get further involved in their child's learning. This work will be led by Education Scotland.

## **22**

Seek the views of parents who use BSL when we revise legislation about parental involvement in education.



## **23**

Instruct Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT) to lead a programme of work to support BSL learning for hearing pupils. This will include, but will not be limited to:

- a) making sure that education authorities and schools know that BSL can be part of the language offer in schools under the 1+2 language policy.
- b) Gathering detailed information on where and how BSL is being offered in schools as part of the 1+2 language policy, and update this information regularly.
- c) Gathering and sharing examples of good practice in teaching BSL to hearing pupils as part of 1+2, and make sure there is guidance to support this.

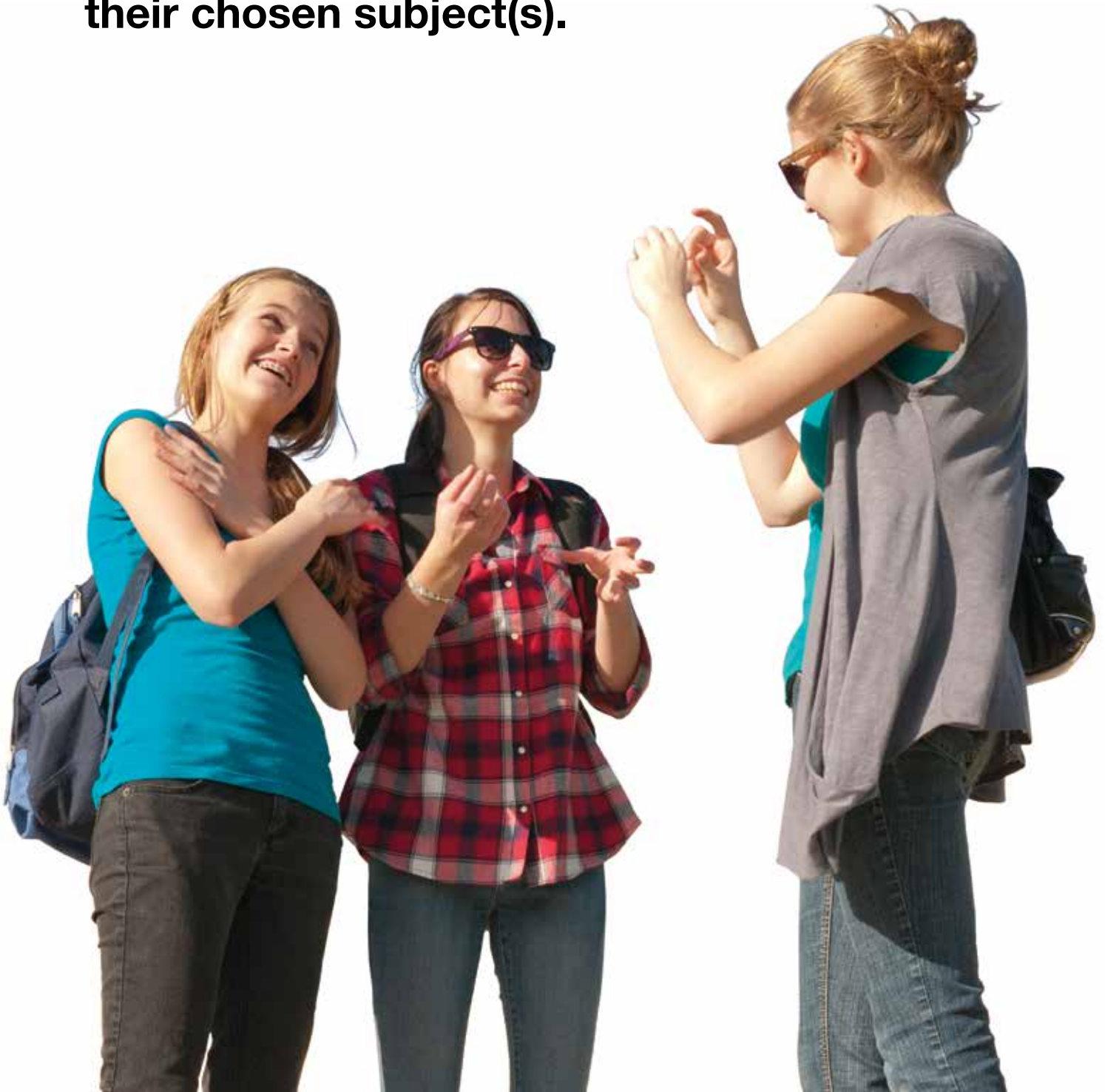
## **24**

Assemble an expert advisory group to support this work. This will include recommendations for a longer term strategy to support the teaching of BSL to hearing pupils, and gathering data to measure progress. This will be led by SCILT, and will report to the Scottish Government by 2020.

## Post-School Education

---

**Our long-term goal:  
BSL users\* will be able to  
maximise their potential at school,  
will be supported to transition  
to post-school education if they  
wish to do so and will receive the  
support they need to do well in  
their chosen subject(s).**





**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

## **25**

Expect all colleges and universities will publish BSL plans, setting out how students who use BSL are supported, with a clear measurable commitment to improvement where necessary. These plans link with college and university outcome agreements and will be reviewed annually by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), to ensure that inequalities experienced by D/deaf and Deafblind BSL students are being addressed.

## **26**

Establish a steering group to help colleges and universities develop their own BSL plans. This will be run by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), will involve BSL users\*, and will include assessing what further guidance colleges and universities need to ensure they are clear about their responsibilities to BSL users\* leaving school and going on to further or higher education.

## **27**

Offer accessible advice and guidance to students who use BSL on funding packages available through the Student Award Agency Scotland (SAAS).

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Training, Work and Social Security

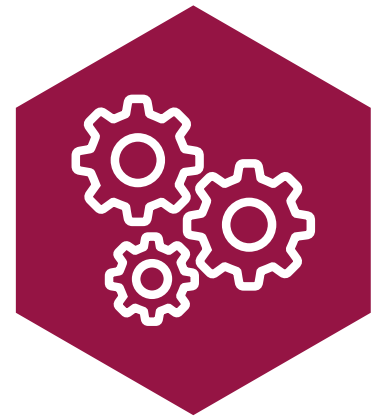
---

### **Our long-term goal:**

**BSL users\* will be supported to develop the skills they need to become valued members of the Scottish workforce, so that they can fulfil their potential, and improve Scotland's economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career.**







**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

**28**

Provide a wide range of information, advice and guidance in BSL for pupils and students to support their career and learning choices and the transition process.

This will be delivered by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and will be taken forward as part of our work to implement the 'Career Education Standard 3-18', which is one of the commitments of the 'Developing our Young Workforce' (DYW) strategy.

**29**

Promote Foundation Apprenticeships for school children who use BSL. This will be delivered through Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and will provide the experience employers look for, backed by industry-recognised qualifications, enabling them to do well in their chosen career from the start.

**30**

Give BSL users\* the highest level of Modern Apprenticeship funding for their chosen framework.

**31**

Work with Jobcentres and others to raise awareness of the needs of BSL users\* to ensure that they are given relevant, appropriate and accessible advice about their options.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## **32**

Ensure that every Scottish Government funded employment programme and training opportunity is accessible to BSL users\* and that tailored and personalised support is available to them. This includes Fair Start Scotland (FSS), our new employment programme which starts in April 2018.

## **33**

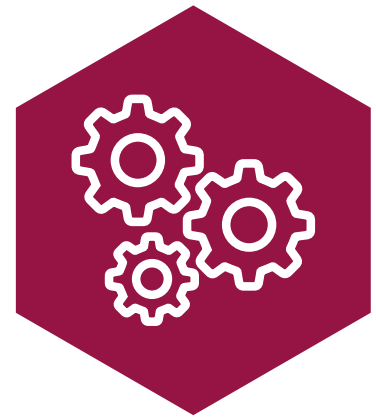
Provide up to 12 months support to BSL users\* who access our in-work support services, including those in Fair Start Scotland (FSS). This is in addition to the 'Access to Work' (AtW) scheme.

## **34**

Work with partners who deliver employment services, and with employer groups already supporting employability (for example the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Regional Groups) to promote more diverse recruitment, and provide specific advice on the needs of BSL users\* so that they are clear about their responsibilities.

## **35**

Raise awareness of the UK Government's 'Access to Work' (AtW) scheme with employers and representative organisations and with BSL users\* themselves, so that BSL users\* who are employed, (including those who are undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship) can benefit from the support it provides.



## **36**

Establish a Workplace Equality Fund in 2017 to address long standing barriers in access to the labour market for people with a range of characteristics, including BSL users\*. The aim of the Workplace Equality Fund will be to reduce employment inequalities so that everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and improve Scotland's economic performance.

## **37**

Ensure that our new social security system is fully accessible to BSL users\* at all stages of the process – including advice, applications, feedback, complaints and appeals.

## **38**

Over 2,400 volunteers from across Scotland have signed up to the Experience Panels. Panel members will help to design and test the new social security system to ensure it works for them, and help ensure our new system is fully accessible to BSL users\*.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

# Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing

---

**Our long-term goal:**  
**BSL users\* will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make informed choices at every stage of their lives.**

**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

## **39**

Publish a schedule for making all screening and immunisation information accessible in BSL. NHS Scotland will produce information in BSL to support Bowel, Breast and Cervical screening programmes.

NHS Scotland will produce information in BSL to support Childhood and Seasonal Flu immunisation programmes. This information will be easy to find on the 'NHS Inform' website.





## **40**

Increase the availability of accurate and relevant health and social care information in BSL and will work with BSL users\* to determine where this information should be located. NHS Health Scotland and NHS 24 will deliver this work in partnership and will review progress in 2019 and every two years thereafter.

## **41**

Work with local authorities, providers and service users to improve the way that adult social care is delivered, including how residential care is commissioned and how care and support is delivered to people at home. The voices and experiences of service users, including BSL users\* will be at the centre of these reforms and will shape planning and implementation and improve outcomes.

## **42**

Take forward the work to extend free personal care to everyone who requires it, regardless of age, taking account of the views and needs of BSL users\*.

## **43**

Develop a learning resource for health and social care staff to raise awareness of BSL and Deaf culture. This will be led by NHS Health Scotland and will be rolled out across Scotland by 2018.

## **44**

We will agree how to improve individual patient health records so that they clearly show when the first or preferred language is BSL and a BSL/English interpreter is needed. NHS services can then be notified in advance of any appointments.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## **45**

Ensure that – in line with Scotland’s Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027 – BSL users\* should get the right help at the right time, expect recovery, and fully enjoy their rights, free from discrimination and stigma. By 2020:

- a) NHS Boards and Integration Authorities should take action so that psychological therapies can be offered on a fair and equal basis to BSL users\*.
- b) NHS 24 and NHS Health Scotland will develop information about mental health accessible for BSL users\* through ‘NHS Inform’.
- c) NHS 24 will explore how telemedicine initiatives like ‘Breathing Space’ can provide counselling in BSL as an easy-to-access mental health support.

## **46**

Implement a new national Interpretation and Translation Policy which includes BSL provision. This will be led by NHS Health Scotland and will provide guidance to support delivery across all NHS boards by 2018.

## **47**

Work with partners to deliver and evaluate two training programmes aimed at supporting BSL/English interpreters to work within the Health sector, with a view to informing a longer-term approach.



## **48**

Work with sport governing bodies and with 'sportsotland' to improve access to information and sporting opportunities for BSL users\*.

## **49**

Ensure that the national strategy to address social isolation and loneliness which will be published for consultation in Autumn 2017 will make explicit reference to the experience and needs of BSL users\*.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Transport

---

**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.**







**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

**50**

Ensure that transport users, including BSL users\*, can participate in the on-going feedback process of the ‘Going Further: Scotland’s Accessible Travel Framework’.

**51**

Research technological solutions for providing accessible information in transport hubs (for example train stations, airports etc.)

**52**

Create guidance for passengers who use BSL on how to contact transport providers when things go wrong on a journey.

**53**

Develop training for transport providers which includes strategies for communicating with BSL users\*.

\* Wherever we refer to ‘BSL users\*’ we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Culture and the Arts

---

### **Our long-term goal:**

**BSL users\* will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, and an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and Deaf culture with the people of Scotland.**





**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

**54**

Enable BSL users\* to take part in culture and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals.

**55**

Support professional pathways to enable BSL users\* to consider a career in culture and the arts.

**56**

Increase information in BSL about culture and the arts on websites and at venues.

**57**

Improve access to the historical environment, and cultural events, and performing arts and film for BSL users\*.

**58**

Seek the views of BSL users\* to ensure that the Scottish Government's new culture strategy organisations for Scotland recognises the value of BSL and Deaf culture, and the contribution it makes to the health, wealth and success of people and our communities.

**59**

Train staff in the major tourist information centres about the Scottish Government's nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service (VRS) called 'contactSCOTLAND-BSL' and how to help our D/deaf and Deafblind BSL visitors access the service. This work will be delivered by VisitScotland.

**60**

Promote the use of the Scottish Government's nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service (VRS) called 'contactSCOTLAND-BSL' on the VisitScotland website.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Justice

---

**Our long-term goal:**  
**BSL users\* will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland.**





**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

**61**

Establish a BSL-led justice advisory group to provide expertise and guidance to justice agencies. The group will play a key role in developing and delivering a programme of improvements to help the justice agencies better meet the needs of BSL users\*.

**62**

Work with partners to deliver and evaluate two training programmes aimed at supporting BSL/English interpreters to work within the Justice sector, with a view to informing a longer-term approach.

**63**

Work with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Police Scotland and Scottish Ambulance Service to develop and implement measures to improve access to emergency services for BSL users\*.

**64**

Improve access to all Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), emergency and preventative strategies (including home fire safety visits), for BSL users\*.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## Democracy

---

**Our long-term goal:**  
**BSL users\* will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians and as board members of our public bodies.**

**By 2020, Scottish Ministers will:**

### 65

Evaluate the Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland) used in the Local Government elections in 2017 to ensure that it meets the needs of BSL users\* who wish to stand for selection and election, and make any necessary changes in time for the next Scottish Parliament election in 2021.

### 66

Work with election organisations, political parties and BSL users\* to ensure that the needs of BSL users\* are being met, enabling them to participate fully in politics.





## **67**

Work with the Electoral Commission in ensuring improved information about voting for BSL users\* is made available in time for the next Scottish Parliament election in 2021 and review whether it has been effective.

## **68**

Work with the political parties, encouraging them to produce election information in BSL in time for the next Scottish Parliament election in 2021.

## **69**

Promote public appointments as a way of participating in public life by producing information about public appointments in BSL, and promoting public appointments specifically to BSL users\*.

## **70**

Ensure that the Scottish Government guidance about board appointments includes specific reference to BSL users\*.

\* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users\*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.



**www.bsiscotlandact2015.scot**



**info@bsiscotlandact2015.scot**



**@bsiscotlandact2015**



**British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015**



**Bsiscotlandact2015**



**contactscotland-bsl.org**



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

© Crown copyright 2017



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3) or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at **www.gov.scot**

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at  
The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-78851-365-4

Published by The Scottish Government, October 2017

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA  
PPDAS307906 (10/17)