

Response to the Scottish Government

BDA Scotland's response to
the consultation on the Draft
British Sign Language (BSL)
National Plan 2017-2023

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Introduction

In 2016 and 2017, members of the National Advisory Group (NAG) worked together to develop Scotland's first draft BSL National Plan. The NAG is made up of Deaf and Deafblind BSL users and parents with Deaf children, working alongside representatives of public bodies, which will implement the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015).

The NAG has been supported by the Deaf Sector Partnership (DSP), which the Scottish Government has funded to help gather the views of BSL users across Scotland to support the development of the plan, and make sure this consultation is fully accessible.

As a member of the Deaf Sector Partnership (DSP), BDA Scotland has worked closely with the Scottish Government to support the implementation of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act (2015), support the development of the NAG and support BSL users to be involved in the development of the first BSL National Plan. More information can be found here - <http://deafsectorpartnership.net/>

The draft plan covers the whole of the Scottish Government and over 50 national public bodies that Scottish Ministers have responsibility for. Other public bodies, including public authorities and regional NHS Boards, will publish their own BSL plans in 2018. The first National Plan will cover the next six years to 2023.

The draft BSL National Plan has ten long-term goals. The first draft plan sets out the steps the Scottish Government thinks they can realistically achieve in the next six years. They want BSL users to tell them what they think about the steps they will take in the first BSL National Plan. Are they the right steps? Are the steps achievable? Will the steps set them off in the right direction to achieve the goals that they have set for themselves? They will use our feedback during the consultation to revise the plan, and they will publish the final plan in October 2017.

This is our official response to the Scottish Government what BDA Scotland thought about the goals and steps in the first BSL National Plan. These responses represent adult members of the Deaf community who use British Sign Language (BSL) and reflect the impact these matters have on their daily lives. We have put forward some ideas and solutions to the ongoing issues to delivering services and accessible information provision.

BDA Scotland is looking forward to contributing to the Local Authority plans when these are introduced and to acting as consultants on behalf of, and in collaboration with, a significant user group for whom the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) was devised.

Throughout the report, BDA Scotland refers to 'BSL users'. This covers all Deaf people whose first or preferred language is BSL.

Our goal for Public Services

Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

1. Develop, test and promote a set of guidelines for all Scottish Public Services to improve access to information and services for BSL users. This will include guidelines on how to ensure that BSL users can participate on a fair and equal basis in the design of Scotland's public services, including providing them with information and support to do so.
2. Promote the use of the Scottish Government service called contactSCOTLAND-BSL with public and third sector organisations and explore the potential for greater use.
3. Explore how to develop and deliver BSL awareness and training that can be accessed quickly across all frontline public services, including all the services covered in this Plan.
4. Consider the need for a comprehensive review of the current BSL/English interpreting landscape, including skill levels, training and regulation. Such a review would develop recommendations aimed at boosting the profession, and supporting the more efficient delivery of interpretation services across the public sector, including all the services covered in this Plan.
5. Explore ways in which BSL/English interpreters can develop more advanced skills to work in specific settings, including the justice and health care systems.
6. Consider where BSL information from across the public sector should be located so that BSL users can easily find it.
7. Give further consideration to what actions we could take to ensure that our approach to delivering public services is person-centred so that BSL users can expect greater consistency.

1.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Public Services?

Yes

1.2 Please tell us why you think this:

These are the right steps but more needs to be done.

More needs to be done because BSL users are not aware of public services. A lot of time was spent at consultation meetings explaining what 'Public Services' meant. The need for training and support has been identified by BDA's outreach workers on the early implementation of the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) and the BSL National Plan (2017-2023), in order that they can support the full participation of BSL users. For example, who are these bodies with a national

focus that are directly accountable to Scottish Ministers, the non-departmental public bodies, NHS Special Boards with a national remit and other public bodies? Further, how do we make the distinction between the National Plan and the one-year plans to be produced by 'other public bodies, including local authorities and regional NHS boards'? (From: 'Introduction by Mark McDonald, MSP, in the document 'Consultation on the Draft British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2017-2023'.) It will be necessary to conduct a different kind of explanation and dialogue so as to ensure positive engagement and contributions to these by BSL users as there is already a sense of consultation 'fatigue'.

It is recognised that many BSL users and communities feel disempowered when accessing and engaging with public bodies. In this context, an open door consultation policy is insufficient – BSL users need to be empowered and supported to walk through that open door in order to influence and access public services.

Training is needed so BSL users know how to positively and diplomatically work and engage with public bodies to encourage local dialogue.

Poor communication access and a lack of cultural competence in service design will adversely affect the kind and quality of service provision available to BSL users.

The key barrier for BSL users in engaging and influencing service provision is that they miss out on information taken for granted by hearing people. Often allied with a poor education or a low level of literacy in English (which is second or third language for many BSL users), the result is a significantly lower knowledge base than the rest of the population. Not being able to easily read documents and fully access television, radio and local news hinders BSL users from understanding how public bodies work. BSL users also experience at least unequal treatment, at worst discrimination, in any processes connected with service provision that are largely dependent on the written word, e.g. understanding complaints policies and making a written complaint.

Staff working within public services also falsely assume that direct written communication with a BSL user is always accurate and sufficient. Many BSL users still experience contact with frontline public services without a BSL/English interpreter being present and where staff resort to writing things down. The findings of *Older Deaf People and Social Care: A Review* (RAD, 2014) identified that poor communication access and lack of cultural competence in service provision will adversely affect the kind and quality of assessment and service provision available to BSL users.

1.3 If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Public Services section, please tell us:

A potential solution is for public services to employ BSL users as employees so the approach to delivering public services is linguistically sound, person-centred and BSL users can expect greater and uniform consistency.

There is a need for BSL users to develop the ability to communicate diplomatically and 'speak out' on the issues with regard to public services that affect them.

There is a need to provide a range of opportunities for BSL users to influence policy and change within public bodies. The BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) also places a requirement on public bodies to prepare and publish BSL authority plans. The Act has the potential to have a hugely beneficial impact on the lives of BSL users.

However, there is currently no requirement within the Act for consultation exercises, disempowering people at a crucial strategic stage where the Act was designed to help. BDA Scotland sees that it is essential to bridge this gap by involving BSL users in relation to the BSL national and local plans. BSL users need to engage more in the design, development and improvement of public bodies' services – they need to be more involved in decisions on public services in forums or focus groups, both as individuals and through representative organisations.

One member of the BSL National Advisory Group (BSL NAG) mentioned that BSL NAG *"...can't be the only ones contributing. We need a wealth of information – from you (BSL users) to give the Scottish Government that is rich and full as possible, which will also help inform the public bodies about our needs."*

Due to recent advances in technology, many companies now offer video relay and interpreting services. We want to see this development embedded in these goals to ensure 24/7 access for BSL users. There was concern that many BSL users are not aware of the current Scottish Government service called contactSCOTLAND-BSL. As a means of filling the knowledge gap and given the absence of suitable information, some of BDA's outreach workers explained the service, and carried out demonstrations of how it works. More needs to be done to promote the use of this service, and the potential for greater use.

In addition to this, we would like public bodies to consider sourcing BSL translators who are Deaf and fluent in BSL to help translate their information and resources. We would like Scottish Ministers to consider funding for BSL translators who are Deaf to be given training to support public services make their information and services accessible to BSL users. A Level 6 Diploma in Sign Language Translation is available – <http://www.signature.org.uk/qualification-specifications>. This would help create employment opportunities for BSL users, and support BSL users to fully understand information and services, which are available to them.

We feel that a set of guidelines for all public services should ensure that information is released in BSL and English at the same time. For example, the planning process for any versions could consider how both BSL and English versions are produced simultaneously, including the matter of 'audience design' so that the material is drafted and delivered with the Deaf BSL audience in mind. Producing a BSL version should not be an 'afterthought'. BDA Scotland has strived to lead by example, producing BSL and English versions at the same time. We are aware that it can be challenging, requiring a greater input of resources but is not impossible. Everyone should have access to the information at the same time – not because it is too expensive or someone else's responsibility.

Our goal for Early Years

Families and carers with a D/deaf or Deafblind child will be given information about BSL and Deaf culture and will be offered support to learn to sign with their child.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

8. Develop information about BSL and Deaf culture for parents whose baby is diagnosed as deaf through the newborn hearing screening.
9. Commit to continuing the support for families and carers with D/deaf and Deafblind children to learn BSL appropriate for communicating with 0-5 year olds.
10. Support 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 providing information on BSL resources on our online Family Information Service website.
11. Develop key materials about play in BSL so that parents who use BSL have access to this information at a critical time in their child's life, so that all children can benefit from positive experiences of play.
12. Improve information and access to early years services for parents who use BSL.
13. Explore the best ways of bringing together children who use BSL as part of the early learning and childcare provision.

2.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Early Years?

Yes

2.2 Please tell us why you think this:

We want to support families and carers with a Deaf child to have a bilingual and bicultural education to improve their life chances.

There are 3,850 Deaf children in Scotland (NDCS, 2016). 90% of Deaf children have hearing parents with limited knowledge of deafness and unlikely to be using any form of BSL. Confidence and empowerment is a very essential part of parents' development – and that of their Deaf children – if they are to get the best start in their home/family setting.

The Consortium for Research into Deaf Education UK-wide survey (CRIDE, 2014) indicates that only 3% of Deaf children use BSL, and 11.3% use some signs with spoken English. This means that parents do not have much exposure to BSL, that BSL may not be a regularly used 'home' language, thus limiting the Deaf child's language development and inclusion as a member of the family.

Opportunities for parents to learn BSL with their children are limited and inconsistent in Scotland. In some cases, parents have had to pay thousands of pounds to learn BSL in order to be able to communicate with their child. Some families have been forced to choose which parent can learn BSL because they cannot afford the costs for both. As part of their sign language legislation, free sign language instruction is available to families in Iceland and Sweden.

BDA Scotland would like to see that no family has to pay for the cost of learning to communicate with their child or for support with communication.

2.3 If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Early Years section, please tell us:

We want to ensure that all parents and/or carers of Deaf children are made aware of BSL classes and given every opportunity to attend including the provision of child/other care and transport if needed. Many bilingual children do better academically due to their language development in early years. Early language acquisition forms fantastic stepping stones towards a good education, improved employment opportunities and positive wellbeing. We want Deaf children to have the same opportunities as other children.

A post on the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group in July 2016 from a Deaf couple who have two profoundly Deaf daughters 6 and 4 stated: *“My 4-year-old daughter is not doing as well in nursery as my 6-year old daughter did, due to poor education. She is not being taught in BSL and has lost confidence. Her teacher moved her to a different group where she is the only Deaf child and none of the staff can sign. It’s unfair because my daughter needs full support in BSL. Her confidence is lost and she gets angry towards teachers who can’t sign. She wants to go home if she doesn’t see any BSL being used in her nursery.”* Clearly, this Deaf couple are upset and unhappy about their daughter’s access in nursery. Critically, they feel disempowered from being able to ask about or challenge the provision their younger Deaf child is getting.

BDA Scotland made a number of recommendations in relation to children in their early years in its response to the Scottish Government’s 2016 Report ‘Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity in Education – A Governance Review’ – <https://bda.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BDA-Scot-Govt-Consultation-paper-review-empo-tech-communities-equ-edu-jan-2017.pdf>

The following are the key points:

- BDA Scotland is keen to see the development and implementation of a new Early Years Language Programme (language planning and learning development) to support every Deaf child and their family at home from birth to the beginning of primary education.
- National Deaf Education commissioning should be mandated to commission these Early Years Language programmes as well as regional centres of excellence and specialist training and high quality support provisions for Deaf children in rural or remote areas.
- We call for the funding of highly experienced Deaf BSL workers to visit and support Deaf children and their families to develop a bicultural environment at home.
- We call for the set up of a network of Sign Intensive Early Years bilingual language

environments. BDA Scotland believes that an improvement in Early Years settings will lead to gains in attainment for Deaf children later in the education system. A sign intensive environment would ensure a strong foundation in both BSL and spoken / written English in the Early Years (BDA, 2014).

- Although it is easier to set up an intensive sign environment in a Deaf school, we suggest they could also be successful in a resource base primary school. The model for this approach comes from Early Years environments in Gaelic schools, which has led to good educational results later on in primary school.

If Sign Intensive Early Years provision is successful, a next step could be the establishment of a BSL-medium school. This is not connected with the Additional Support for Learning, open to both Deaf and hearing children. This initiative could draw from the many worldwide examples of co-enrolment schools where equal numbers of Deaf and hearing children work together using both languages to learn and two teachers in each class (e.g. Madrid & Hong Kong in Marshark, Knoors & Tang, 2014; Albuquerque Sign Language Academy, 2012).

It is particularly challenging to establish a Sign Intensive Early Years service in remote rural areas. Currently, many parents of Deaf children do not know, or understand the value, of this sort of environment; but its advantage is that it will enable Deaf children to acquire fluency in at least one language in the early years. We believe parents will understand the value of post-nursery bilingualism when they can see the results of what their child can actually do with more than one language and the wide range of social interactions their Deaf child will achieve using both BSL and English.

Our first goal for Education

That children and young people who use BSL reach their full potential at school.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

14. Discuss with General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) how we could remove barriers to register Deaf people who want to become teachers.
15. Investigate the qualification level of BSL that teachers have and review how the General Teaching Council for Scotland's Professional Update and Standards could inform guidance for teachers of pupils who use BSL.
16. Discuss with Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) the potential for developing SQA Awards in BSL.
17. Ensure that appropriate guidance and resources are available to schools and local authorities.

Our second goal for Education

That parents who use BSL can access the same opportunities to be involved in their child's education as other parents.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

18. Ensure that guidance to schools and local authorities consider the needs of parents who use BSL.
19. Consider what more we can do to ensure that parents who use BSL can be fully involved in their child's education.

Our third goal for Education

That the 1+2 language learning policy offers the opportunity for BSL to be included in the suite of languages local authorities choose to offer to children and young people.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

20. Make sure that education authorities and schools know that BSL can be part of the language offer in schools under 1+2 language policy.
21. Gather information annually on where BSL is being offered in schools as part of the 1+2 language policy.
22. Gather and share examples of good practice in teaching BSL to hearing pupils as part of 1+2, and make sure there is guidance to support this.

3.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Education?

Yes

3.2 Please tell us why you think this:

A member of the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group added in November 2016: *“So many Deaf children (including my 5 profoundly Deaf grandchildren) have suffered and continue to be failed in mainstream schools because there is no choice for them. Action should be taken now to deal with this drastic situation.”*

The continuing failure of Deaf children to achieve academic parity with their peers requires fair and impartial research into the education of Deaf children with independent recommendations. The evidence of the failures and successes can be used to develop future policy to improve the life chances of Deaf children.

The BDA has always had a strong interest in educational issues. We submitted a Supplementary Report to the UK Shadow report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (BDA, 2014). In this report we outlined our views on issues affecting BSL users in the education system.

The BDA is the UK’s Ordinary Member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), which recently produced a very important Position Paper on the Language Rights of Deaf Children (WFD, 2016). The report recognised that sign languages are equal in status to spoken languages and should be respected and promoted thus in educational settings, helping Deaf children to exercise their right to fully develop their cultural and linguistic identity in accordance with Article 30 of the CRPD, which is essential for the development of the personality, self-esteem and resilience of Deaf children.

We discuss here those Deaf children who might learn through BSL, many of whom currently don’t. We believe that this proportion is decided by the attitudes of the health service, audiology services, speech and language therapy services, educational services, the government, the media, parents and voluntary organisations.

We believe the environment will change with the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) and the support of the Scottish Ministers enabling families and carers with a Deaf child to have more opportunities to learn BSL intensively while their Deaf child is young, and continuously as their child grows up. This Act will create a cultural shift in attitudes about BSL users which we hope will influence the education system too, so that BSL is accepted and valued in families across Scotland.

However, the policy background in Scotland is still not favourable to the maintenance of BSL for Deaf children. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act (2000) made it clear that the local school was presumed to be the best place for all children. While BDA Scotland supports the principles behind inclusive education, in the sense that it means justice for all children to achieve their full potential, we don’t support isolation of Deaf BSL users in their local schools.

Physically being in the local school is often not conducive to linguistic inclusion at all. Where parents choose this option, we always press on schools to ensure that Deaf children should be allowed properly qualified educational BSL/English interpreters (minimum BSL Level 6) and highly skilled Deaf specialist staff supporting Deaf students.

Everyone should be able to develop a first language. This principle was agreed internationally by the UN in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education emphasises the significance of sign language as a medium of communication in article 21: *'Educational policies should take full account of individual differences and situations. The importance of sign language as the medium of communication among the deaf, for example, should be recognized and provision made to ensure that all deaf persons have access to education in their national sign language. Owing to the particular communication needs of deaf and deaf/blind persons, their education may be more suitably provided in special schools or special classes and units in mainstream schools.'* (Article 21 of the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO 1994)

In Scotland the 'presumption of mainstreaming' (Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000) should not override children's rights to a fluent language. This may involve additional costs, such as transport, but children's linguistic rights to a fluent first language must be prioritised.

3.3 If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Education section, please tell us:

A recent research by the NDCS found that *'...a vast majority of deaf and hearing children keen to learn sign language. 97% want it taught at schools and 92% want it to be a GCSE option.'* (NDCS, 2017.) Their findings highlight significant interest in BSL among young people, with 91% keen to study it and 92% calling for it to be offered as a GCSE (or National 4/5) in Scotland. They also suggest this is *'...not only a deaf issue; hearing respondents actually showed more interest in learning BSL than deaf respondents.'* Young people gave varied reasons for wanting to learn BSL, from social inclusion and Deaf Awareness to employability and communication skills. Some argued it could benefit those who struggle with reading, writing or speaking English as a second language.

In addition to this, there was a posting in March 2017: *"Just wish sign language was more available in UK. I am deaf and in school I was forced to learn French and German but never had the option of sign language. Now that I'm older and my hearing has got worse I could really do with learning sign language but classes are so expensive. I hope one-day sign language is free and taught in schools."*

Gaelic is an interesting comparison to make with BSL users in Scotland because most Gaelic medium education takes place alongside English medium classes in the same school, just as most Deaf children are educated currently in mainstream schools or resource bases. In addition, most parents who send their children to Gaelic medium schools don't use Gaelic in the home, and hearing parents of Deaf children also often don't use BSL in the home as they have usually had no contact with the language before their child is born Deaf. BDA Scotland

believe that the experience of successful Gaelic medium education in Scotland could be usefully considered by local authorities in planning Deaf Education.

A posting on BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group in December 2016: "I saw in the news a few days ago about the Scottish Government's additional funding for Glasgow's two Gaelic schools so that more young people can learn in Gaelic-medium education. What about BSL? As you know, the main aim of the BSL (Scotland) Act is to promote the use of BSL. We could ask the Scottish Government to give us money to set up a BSL school so that people can learn BSL, and possibly to train Deaf people to teach BSL. I would like an opportunity to explain why I suggested and support this idea. A BSL school would be similar to Gaelic schools. One of my daughters' friends is half Greek. His mother is Greek and wanted her son to grow up bilingual. Although she spoke Greek, she preferred him to learn in a formal setting, so she sent him to a Greek school every Saturday – not just to learn Greek but also to learn about their culture and history. The same happened to my other daughter's Chinese friend who attends a Chinese school every Saturday to learn written/spoken Chinese, the culture and history and so on. That's something I would like to see happening. If Deaf children attend mainstream schools with no access to BSL, having the opportunity to attend BSL schools with trained Deaf teachers would allow them to learn BSL, its culture and history so that they could become more proud of their language."

Currently we believe the rhetoric around informed choice is not always reflected in reality – largely because the funding tied up in Deaf Education is currently too weighted in favour of teachers of Deaf children who can't sign fluently, and not enough towards Deaf or fluent BSL-using teachers and qualified educational BSL/English interpreters.

We hope Scottish Ministers will recognise the importance of listening to the experiences of BSL users sharing their accounts, be they successes, failures or frustrations in primary, secondary, further and higher education and training. Their experiences must outweigh those of non-Deaf professionals and teachers who are prone to make biased or unbalanced decisions and impose controls over Deaf Education provision.

Best governance practice in the provision of Deaf Education must bring together both Deaf BSL experts and non-Deaf professionals to make the huge changes necessary for the futures of Deaf children and young people.

Here is a summary of the recommendations made by BDA Scotland in response to the Scottish Government's 2016 Report 'Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity in Education – A Governance Review':

The following are key points:

- We call for a new sub-committee made up of key experts to focus on the provision of Deaf Education Resourced Bases, ensuring that their delivery and funding are effective and well planned to meet current and future needs.
- We call for a provision of regional centres of Deaf Education excellence (the 'school within a school' model) plus larger resource based nurseries and schools with large numbers of young Deaf people to allow signing communities to flourish.

- Decisions on recruitment of teachers and support staff to work directly with Deaf children should not be made without consulting with a qualified Deaf BSL expert.
- The government should encourage teachers and schools (where there are Deaf Education Resourced Bases or similar) to develop an Authority BSL plan under the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015).
- We call for School Council representatives and management to be properly trained and also be more aware of different levels of BSL skill: BSL Level 1, 2, 3, 4 and BSL/English interpreting (Level 6).

We recognise that there has been no research into the current governance decision making relating to Deaf Education, but we believe a very high percentage of boards of governors in mainstream schools (which at least 80% of Deaf children and young people currently attend) may not have direct knowledge and/or understanding of the right level of support Deaf children and young people need at school and so rely on management to make recommendations that may not always be in the best interests of Deaf children and young people.

As above, we believe there are very few School Council representatives who have shown a real interest or understanding about the provision of Deaf Education Resourced Bases within mainstream schools. We also believe a very low number of mainstream schools with Deaf Education Resourced Bases have Deaf people on their School Councils. We are not aware that any actively advertise for Deaf people to join their School Councils.

In addition, we don't know how well informed Schools' Councils and management are about the provision and resources that Deaf Education Units need; specifically, to maximise Deaf children's potential and make sure they function at a level equal to hearing children. Both School Councils and Management should be properly trained to understand more about Deaf Education and Deaf & BSL issues.

One of the main concerns often raised is schools continually employing poorly skilled Communication Support Workers (CSWs) and Learning Support or Teaching Assistants with only BSL Level 1 or 2 (SCQF Level 4 and 5). We believe School Council representatives and management are generally unaware of the large difference between BSL Level 2 and BSL Level 6 (SCQF Level 10). We also believe a very high percentage of these staff are not actively involved in the BSL community, and so have no personal empathy (limited understanding and knowledge) of Deaf culture, language, identity and community.

There is very little information available about the qualification levels in BSL of non-teaching staff working with Deaf children in Scottish schools. The CRIDE survey (2014) states that there are 10.4 full time equivalent posts working as 'communication support workers / interpreters / communicators' for the whole of Scotland (NDCS, 2014: 15). This figure is shockingly low given that 15% of all Deaf children in Scotland use BSL, suggesting that Teachers of the Deaf are taking on an 'interpreting' role.

There are 364.6 FTE in this role in England, which has ten times the population. If the same proportion of staff were employed in Scotland we would see at least 36.

Neither is there any official Government guidance on the skill levels needed by these members of staff. BDA Scotland insists that these support staff are all qualified to interpreter level, i.e. hold a Level 6 BSL / English interpreting qualification or university degree in BSL/ English interpreting and be registered with Scottish Association of Sign Language (SASLI) or National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) so that their regular updating and professional development is logged. Evidence from Deaf and hearing participants was mentioned in BDA Scotland's official response to the Scottish Parliament Education Committee in 2015 and shows the many ways in which poor interpreting skill and lack of understanding of the professional role of the interpreter impacts on Deaf children's school achievements and confidence.

It is unknown whether School Councils and management or Local Authority services for D/ deaf children are committed to provide an advanced BSL training budget so that support staff can obtain qualifications up to BSL Level 6. But there is very little evidence that schools or authorities are making this commitment. This also raises the question of why schools are not prepared to employ skilled, fluent Deaf BSL staff, especially in primary schools, which would make a huge difference and provide better outcomes for Deaf children than employing hearing staff with only BSL Level 1, 2 or 3.

The BDA is very clear that any staff with a qualification below BSL Level 6 are not properly trained or equipped to support Deaf children using fluent BSL. This will simply set Deaf children up to fail, resulting in a legacy of 'catch-up' for the child and wasted state funding.

One of the solutions would be to establish a sub-committee focusing on the provision of Deaf Education Resourced Bases, ensuring that their delivery and funding are effective and well planned to meet current and future needs. The sub-committee should invite key experts including Deaf BSL using professionals to join them. Resources for Deaf children's education should be allocated based on the right of Deaf children to linguistic and educational equality with hearing children. Resources should not be allocated on the basis of a fixed LEA 'Additional Support' budget, or on the basis that some parents know more about the Individual Education Plan (IEP) procedure than others. This will ensure a fairer Deaf Education system which is well resourced and can deliver better results for all Deaf children along with an advanced BSL training programme for support staff, teachers and parents. There should also be regular 'BSL Clubs' for hearing children and families of Deaf children to learn and make friends with Deaf children in a bilingual environment.

BSL users have told us that Deaf or specialist schools have low expectations of Deaf children. Such views should be challenged and changed by bringing in Deaf adult role models and more qualified Teachers of the Deaf who can also get them more involved in the BSL community.

Whilst we support the Scottish Ministers' steps, we believe there is a great need to reform and improve the Deaf Education system across Scotland. We have found two sources of statistical information about the signing skills of teachers of deaf children in Scotland: a survey carried out by the BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group (Scottish Government, 2009), and the CRIDE survey 2014 (NDCS, 2014). Both conclude with very similar results: around

8% to 10% of teachers of deaf children in Scotland have signing skills at level 3 or above. This level is not an SCQF level but an SVQ equivalent, so it represents a Higher in a language or SCQF level 6. We do not think this is a high enough level of competency in a language; most people with a Higher in Spanish or French would not be able to teach or interpret in that language. We also gathered further qualitative data from Deaf young people and parents about the BSL skills of teachers of deaf children as part of our response paper to the Scottish Parliament Education Committee in 2015 and the evidence we submitted included the effect on Deaf children of Teachers of the Deaf having such weak BSL skills.

We strongly believe that the most important and valuable step forward would be the setting up of an Early Years Language Programme for Deaf Children and Families. This would benefit both the Deaf child and their family with the acquisition of fluent BSL and English before a child starts primary school.

In conclusion, we propose the following Deaf Education principles, which we believe will produce the best results:

- A Deaf child has a right to be taught by Deaf and hearing teachers who use BSL fluently and hold the equivalent of BSL Level 6.
- Deaf teachers should take a leadership role in bilingual BSL/English schools and in services for Deaf children
- Deaf children and young people have the right to excellent language and communication support from qualified educational BSL/English interpreters. Standards must be monitored by Education Scotland inspection teams, which should include native BSL users and qualified registered BSL/English interpreters. (Note: *This should be part of the BSL National Plan, and, also be incorporated in the plans by Education Scotland and Local Authorities.*)
- Deaf adults and other people who use BSL fluently should be encouraged to train to work in education in roles such as support workers, educational instructors, teaching assistants, cooks, playground assistants, and teachers.
- Reform of the Teacher of the Deaf training course is essential and fluency in BSL should be a prerequisite for teaching children whose preferred language is BSL. Teachers who are not bilingual in BSL should work with qualified educational BSL/English interpreters in the classroom.
- Existing Teachers of the Deaf (ToD) should be asked by the Education Departments to improve their BSL skills and undergo training in bilingual methods or lose their ToD status within 5 years. They could continue to work only with Deaf students who prefer speech as their medium of instruction.
- Education Scotland should recruit and set up a pool of HMI Inspectors of BSL expertise in order to monitor the effectiveness of the bilingual development of Deaf BSL users.

We recognise that the number of Deaf children using BSL varies in every local authority from very low (especially in rural and remote areas) to high (cities & towns). But for rural or remote areas, Deaf Education support comprises only a few hours a week direct support to the Deaf child, while those in large towns and cities get more hours of support. This is unfair.

It would be beneficial to have a sub-committee on Deaf Education provision. We strongly believe it would be cost efficient for Scottish Government to set up a new national commissioning team responsible for the whole of Scotland which would manage and support the Deaf Education programme, such as Early Years Language programmes, regional centres of excellence for Deaf children and young people ('school within a school' model). This should be directly funded by the Scottish Government, rather than local authorities to ensure consistency. We want Scottish Deaf Education to have the same principles, policy and statements across the country. Currently, schools have different views on Deaf children, some promote oralism only, some total communication, some a BSL / English bilingual approach.

Yet they are all funded by the state and the state should be more consistent. The current situation is not helpful to the future of Deaf children. It should be one policy for all with no more conflicts, so we advocate the setting up of a national commissioning team.

We believe the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) will influence Scottish Ministers to review the guidance which states that all teachers of Deaf children should have level 3 BSL as a minimum with a commitment to upgrade within 2 years to a level 6 interpreting qualification if they are taking on that role in class. Furthermore, we believe that all teachers of Deaf children working with the under 5s and parents of this age group should have this minimum level of competency in BSL so that they are able to work with parents to properly advise them about the options available. If the parents choose to use BSL, the teachers will then be ready to start introducing the language in the early years. BDA Scotland would like to see many more BSL users in these early years' roles, as discussed below.

The recent primary 1 + 2 Languages strategy (Scottish Government, 2012) is a very welcome move, which could see hearing and Deaf children learning BSL as a modern language throughout primary school. Teaching BSL to children, however, is a specific skill, not one mentioned in the Scottish Government competences for Teachers of the Deaf (Scottish Government, 2007) and as far as we know modern language teaching approaches are not part of the course to train Teachers of the Deaf. In one particular location, Dingwall Academy, a successful project at secondary level has seen a Teacher of the Deaf who is also a qualified BSL / English interpreter working with a Deaf teacher qualified to teach BSL to advanced levels (Kinsman, 2014). Another, Windsor Park School (Falkirk), has a BSL programme, and the Head of Windsor Park School and Sensory Service can use BSL.

When recruiting teachers and support staff to work directly with Deaf children, schools should not make any decisions without consulting with a suitably qualified Deaf BSL expert. Schools with Deaf Education Resourced Bases should produce an Authority BSL plan as required by the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015).

No schools should make their own Deaf Education policy different to others. It is not helpful for parents when they must send a Deaf child far away to a school that provides BSL, because their local school does not. That is why we are pressing for national Deaf Education commissioning which would ensure fair and equal treatment for all Deaf children across Scotland. For example, all Deaf Education Resourced Bases and Deaf/specialist schools

should have the same bilingual policy, illustrating their approach, which professionals in Deaf Education can apply without variation in the service. The schools will be staffed by Deaf professionals and native BSL users.

Deaf or specialist schools, Deaf Education Resourced Bases (being part of mainstream schools) and regional centres for Deaf Education (schools within schools) should:

- Deliver the National Deaf Studies Curriculum (<http://www.fbarnes.camden.sch.uk/useful-info/resources/national-deaf-studies-curriculum>). This will help every Deaf child to learn about Deaf Identity, Community, Language and History. It should include inviting Deaf Adult role models or professionals to give talks.
- Engage with the local Deaf Community – meeting BSL users at clubs and events.
- Develop an Early Years Language Programme, enabling parents of a newly-diagnosed Deaf child to meet with other parents of older Deaf children.

From the CRIDE 2014 survey (NDCS, 2014) we can see that only 8 local authority services in Scotland have staff with level 3 BSL or above. This means that in the 24 other local authorities there is no specialist teacher with this level of BSL available. This problem is most likely to affect rural areas and those local authorities, which don't have a resource base school or Deaf school available.

Recent University of Edinburgh research (O'Neill et al, 2014: 66) notes that 20 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland do not have a resource base school. Young people in their study who had been to a Deaf school or resource base school were much more likely to use BSL or speech with sign than children who attended their local school.

Recognising there are very few Deaf children and young people in remote and rural areas, we call upon the Scottish Ministers to set up Early Years Language Programme to fund highly experienced Deaf BSL workers to visit and support Deaf child and his/her family to develop a bicultural environment at home, reducing social and communication isolation. BDA Scotland has implemented a new Deaf Roots and Pride (DRP) project and we believe this will make a real difference in remote and rural areas.

We believe the government should encourage teachers and schools (where there are Deaf Education Resourced Bases or similar) should make an Authority BSL plan under the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015), working more closely with local BSL community and BSL experts.

We strongly believe a national Deaf Education commissioning team would bring real value for money with consistency across all regional centres. *It is suggested that the commissioning team brings in specialist strategic commissioning director, Teachers of the Deaf and Deaf BSL experts. The team must have good working knowledge and experience in the Deaf Education provision. The team is part of the Scottish Government Commissioning, providing reports to the National Advisory BSL Group (part of BSL (Scotland) Act requirements).*

It will not work if local authorities continue to make their own decisions about Deaf Education, putting more pressure on parents to move to an area that provides better quality Deaf Education. Effectively, we should have one Deaf Education team for the whole of Scotland.

We believe an Early Years Language programme focusing on the language plan and learning development should be the top priority, providing support within every Deaf child's home environment from birth to the beginning of primary school education.

A language plan and learning development programme for the family are essential as between 90% and 95% of parents of D/deaf children are hearing, with no real previous knowledge or understanding of bilingual BSL / English.

The Early Years Language programme would employ Deaf BSL specialists to support families at home, organise BSL family gatherings and BSL activities. This will help develop the cultural and linguistic identity that is essential for the development of the personality and self-esteem of Deaf children. Research clearly shows that Deaf children given quality education multilingually (BSL and written/spoken language) are most likely to succeed academically and become active citizens and full members of wider society. Additionally, research also shows exposure to BSL does not stop speech acquisition or language learning.

We insist that there should be more Deaf role models in schools in Scotland, in every relevant role. This will increase the possibility of a sign intensive environment being available in every area of Scotland so that the Deaf child and their family who choose BSL have a real possibility of using it to support their learning (BDA, 2014). There is currently very little data available about the proportion of qualified teachers, teachers of Deaf children or other support staff who are Deaf. We propose a step programme to ensure that Deaf children in all areas and types of provision can have regular contact with Deaf qualified adults. This includes Deaf children in urban and rural authorities, and those in mainstream, resource based and Deaf schools. To achieve this in Scotland we need a positive recruitment strategy, based on the model of recruiting teachers who can work in Gaelic Medium Education settings (HMIE, 2011).

There are very few Deaf teachers in the UK. Figures indicate approximately 10% of all Teachers of the Deaf have declared a hearing loss (Batterbury 2012:256). However not all of these are Deaf teachers with BSL skills. We need more qualified teachers who are Deaf and use BSL. The UN CRPD (article 24.4) specifies the need for more Deaf and disabled teachers. It requires the UK to *"...take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in BSL and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education."* To facilitate this, Deaf trainee teachers should be offered the possibility of obtaining their qualifications with their placement and teaching practice in a Deaf school or accessible BSL setting with children. This would cost the government nothing and enable more Deaf trainee teachers to gain qualified teacher status.

BDA Scotland proposes that national Deaf Education commissioning should be mandated to commission Early Years Language programmes, regional centres of excellence, specialist training and specialist high quality support provisions for Deaf children in rural or remote areas. The long-term effects of the right education for Deaf children would be reduced costs in unemployment benefits, mental health support and other associated support such as advocacy and community support in later life.

A national Deaf Education commissioning team will be able to set measurable outcomes and outputs for each commissioned project. For example, monitoring why some regions are improving while others are not. Setting key performance targets is essential to help them deliver and maintain good Deaf Education services, including a BSL plan as required by the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015).

We believe this will lead to much better educational outcomes for Deaf children:

- Setting up a network of Sign Intensive Early Years bilingual language environments so that all Deaf children can have access to a fluent first language before they start school
- Monitoring the low achievers in much more detail so that it is clear which Deaf pupils are disproportionately being failed by the education system
- Establishing strong sign bilingual practice in Scottish schools with higher expectations for BSL pupils and minimum BSL levels for staff supporting them

We believe that a much greater proportion of Deaf children would benefit from a sign bilingual education, whether that is in a mainstream or a Deaf school. Certainly this should be larger than the 15% of Deaf children who currently have some sign while they are at school. Too often this is only a smattering of Sign Supported English because of the almost non-existent interpreting skills of Teachers of the Deaf.

We don't think that academic achievement is the only measure of a successful schooling; just as important is self-confidence, resilience, friendships with a wide range of people, and having the personal resources to solve problems and make decisions about moving to work and adult relationships.

Our vision for Deaf Education in Scotland is that the Scottish Government is able to build on the support it has already shown towards BSL, to at last provide high quality sign bilingual educational settings where Deaf children can flourish learning both languages (BSL and written/read English). As an organisation, our members would be very willing to advise and work with the Scottish Government to make these plans become a reality.

In conclusion, we would like the Scottish Government to set up an internal working group to explore the future of Deaf Education, using this paper and inviting key organisations and schools such as BDA Scotland, British Association of Teachers for the Deaf (BATOD), National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI), National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD), University of Edinburgh's Scottish Sensory Centre, Heriot Watt University (Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies), Dingwall Academy, Windsor Park School, Signature, the SQA, representatives from the Youth National Advisory Group (YNAG), and, Deaf Teachers representatives to further discussions.

Our first goal for Post-School Education

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 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

23. Make sure that students whose first or preferred language is BSL have a much more positive experience when they make the transition to post-school education. We will make sure that schools, colleges, universities and employers are aware of their responsibilities. We will work together to improve the information given to BSL users.
24. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) will establish a steering group to help colleges and universities develop their own BSL plans.

4.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Post-School Education?

Yes

4.2 Please tell us why you think this:

These are the right steps but more needs to be done.

4.3 If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Post-School Education section, please tell us:

Some colleges and universities employ Disability Advisors – why don't they employ a specialist BSL Advisor for Post-School Education to support BSL users' transition.

Students whose first or preferred language is BSL should have access to communication support at BSL Level 6 not below.

Support for making the transition needs to be stronger, for example, career advisors need BSL awareness training to be able to support BSL users especially with CVs, application forms and their chosen career pathway. A toolkit could be developed for BSL users to support them in this goal, and ensure that they receive the support to proceed in their chosen subjects/careers.

Communication support should be available for BSL users throughout their course of study. This should include information about a range of different communication support and technical aids, which will help BSL users to engage in education and their everyday life to improve their career and social prospects in the future.

BDA Scotland has implemented a new Deaf Roots and Pride project and we believe this model will make a real difference to BSL users being supported to transition. We believe signposting will help BSL users to receive information, explore options and opportunities available to them enabling them to make decisions that are best for them. Organisations who are being signposted should make sure that their information, resources, services and events are accessible for BSL users. For example, organisations like SAAS, UCAS, and Skills Development Scotland to invite BSL users in forums or focus groups or both as individuals and through representative organisations to improve the information given to BSL users.

We welcome the recommendations of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to establish a steering group, and would like them to engage and involve BSL users to help colleges and universities develop their own BSL plans. Their experiences would be an excellent source of information.

Our first goal for Employment

People who use BSL will be supported to develop the necessary skills to become valued members of the Scottish workforce, and will have fair and equal access to employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships and employability programmes.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

25. Ensure fair and equal access to employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships and employability programmes.
26. Introduce in April 2018, a new Scottish employability programme. The key principle of this service is that all those who participate (including BSL users) will receive support to find and sustain work.

Our second goal for Employment

BSL users will be provided with support in the workplace to enable them to remain in and progress in their chosen career.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

27. Provide in-work support, of up to 12 months, for BSL users accessing any of our in-work support services.
28. In the new devolved employment services, we will expect those who deliver employment services to work with specialist employment support partners at a local and national level to help tackle the range of barriers that all participants face, including BSL users.
29. We will actively promote the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Access to Work (ATW) scheme to employers and BSL users to ensure a higher uptake and use of the scheme in Scotland.

5.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Employment?

Yes

5.2 Please tell us why you think this:

Some of these are the right steps but we are not sure about the 'devolved employment services' (step no.28), and how this will work at a local and national level.

We need more information about this. 19% of BSL users are currently unemployed

compared to 5% of non-BSL users. Employers' fear of the perceived costs of making adjustments to the workforce is a key barrier to the recruitment of BSL users to the Scottish workforce – 70% of BSL users believe they have failed to get a job because of their deafness (SCoD, 2017 – <http://www.scod.org.uk/faqs/statistics/>).

A posting on the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group in November 2016: “My son was advised by Kirkcaldy Job Centre that when applying for jobs, it might be better not to state on the application form that you will need an interpreter for interviews, as it will put employers off. Seriously. This is wrong.” Staff at Job Centres have advised BSL users not to put ‘Deaf’ on their CVs or application forms, as they would not be able to access employment opportunities. They advised BSL users to put down ‘disabled’ instead of ‘BSL’ or ‘Deaf’, which made them uncomfortable.

BSL users still have this discussion: when do you disclose? Should they declare at the application stage? For BSL users with CVs, which often refers to Deaf schools, and may comprise periods of work within the Deaf community, will employers detect from same that they are a BSL user? Employers do still discriminate, and BSL users deliberately do not mention it because they feel it will go against them especially when they see on the application form or CV that a BSL/English interpreter is needed for interview or within work.

The challenge for Scottish Ministers is how to change this mindset.

This also raises the issue of whether the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) will cover UK wide government departments. Job Centres are not a Scottish public body but the Scottish Ministers should still make representations to Westminster and the relevant civil service department.

Should there be a campaign to support employers in Scotland recognise the benefits of employing BSL users? The model by Employability in Scotland (<http://www.employabilityinscotland.com>), which aims to increase job opportunities for disabled people by raising awareness of the untapped talent that exists in Scotland, could be implemented for BSL users.

Employers should not worry about extra costs of employing a BSL user, as there is the Access to Work scheme, which supports organisations/businesses with BSL/English interpreting support. This campaign forms part of a range of measures being undertaken by the Scottish Government to help reduce the disability employment gap. The Disability Campaign 2017 Stakeholder Toolkit could be adapted for BSL users in order to encourage businesses to employ BSL users.

In addition to this, the current cap on Access to Work spending should be removed, as this is an investment rather than a cost. For every pound spent on Access to Work support the Treasury receives £1.60 in revenue (Inclusion Scotland, 2017). The provision of BSL/English interpreters is a route into employment for BSL users. They need this financial support to pay for interpreters so that they can access or remain in employment. 74% of BSL users said they had been prevented from progressing at work because of their deafness (SCoD, 2017) so this ATW provision will allow BSL users to become valued members of the Scottish workforce.

We need to support BSL users to have equal access to employment opportunities. We are concerned about the UK Government's cuts to employability programmes, which has reduced the budget to be devolved from £52m to just £7m (Inclusion Scotland, 2017).

The Access to Work budget should be devolved to ensure that BSL users are able to access the same level of support as other BSL users in the rest of the UK.

5.3 If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Employment section, please tell us:

We would like fairer assessments for Access to Work (ATW) for BSL users. Many BSL users are still experiencing difficulties when being assessed for ATW. We want these assessments to be fair and accessible in BSL to ensure the most vulnerable do not lose on their rightful entitlements. Fair and realistic assessments will ensure BSL users stay in their jobs.

Models of good practice or projects elsewhere could be useful on access to apprenticeships. For example, East Lancashire Deaf Society (ELDS) has a dedicated apprenticeship centre to cater for young Deaf BSL users in Lancashire. Its apprenticeship facility is providing BSL users with training and employment opportunities in the childcare, domiciliary care, joinery, catering, hospitality, IT and administration sectors. ELDS employs a small number of Deaf apprentices through its various social enterprises, including a restaurant, offices to let, a conference centre and a children's nursery. It also provides the key skills required for successful completion of vocational qualifications in order for apprentices to be able to go onto mainstream employment. Most importantly, they run a programme of remedial education to support young Deaf people to improve their numeracy and literacy skills rendered deficient by the lack of an appropriate bilingual education, and so compete on an equal basis in the workplace.

We would like the Scottish Ministers to consider options for BSL users to access to employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships and employability programmes – through Deaf organisations and existing mainstream organisations/services. There should be a range of options for BSL users to be provided with support in the workplace – and that this is not restricted to only one service/organisation.

Health, Mental Health and Social Care

Our goal for Health, Mental Health and Social Care

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 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

30. Ensure that information on national health screening and immunisation programmes is routinely translated into BSL and is readily available and easy to access.
31. Improve access to, and the availability of, professionally approved health information in BSL by ensuring that it is located in a central place online.
32. Develop and roll out BSL awareness training for health and social care staff across Scotland ensuring that it is readily accessible at the point of need and tailored to a health setting.
33. Consider ways to improve individual patient health records so that a person's records clearly indicate when a patient's first or preferred language is BSL.
34. Ensure that information about people's rights to directing their own social care and support (Self-directed Support) is available in BSL.
35. Ensure that a national source of mental health information, advice and support is developed for BSL users.

6.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Health, Mental Health and Social Care?

Yes

6.2 Please tell us why you think this:

The consequences of the social, educational and economic circumstances in which today's generation of BSL users have grown up and led their adult lives has created significant vulnerabilities associated with health, well-being, access to resources and safety. BSL users also experience life-long inequalities in access to health, education and social care, resulting in significantly poorer health and well-being outcomes.

There is significant and mounting evidence that in relation both to physical and mental health they are likely to experience significant inequalities.

- BSL users experience much poorer mental health than their hearing counterparts.
- They have much poorer physical health.

- They experience major barriers in accessing services.
- When engaged with services, they are more vulnerable to missed or incorrect diagnoses.

Barriers to access experienced by BSL users in relation to health are at the very heart of inequalities. *Sick of It: How the Health Service is Failing Deaf People* by SignHealth (2014) identified that 56% of Deaf people had not used health services due to a lack of BSL/English interpreting support, whilst 33% had not used health services because they could not arrange appointments easily.

Many BSL users subsequently delay action around health issues until the situation becomes critical and more costly to remedy, highlighting their vulnerability within healthcare systems. This is also representative of their experiences and outcomes in accessing virtually all mainstream services, resulting in significant negative impacts on the wellbeing of BSL users.

In many cases, this can create a vicious circle, as BSL users develop an increased need for support from mainstream services that are often ill-prepared to respond effectively to their access and support needs. This leaves BSL users routinely feeling disempowered, lacking the knowledge and confidence to know how to address their own needs and overcome the communication barriers they face in accessing public and local authority services.

Non-BSL users generally have clear access to appropriate care pathways with the right support, but if BSL users do not get the same level of access, they are at risk of their health deteriorating. Both BSL and non-BSL users should have equal access to appropriate care pathways.

In addition to this, research states that over 40% of young Deaf people experience a range of mental health problems in comparison to 25% of the general population (Hindley et al, 1994). On the prevalence of the anxiety and depression in adult Deaf populations, 33% have either anxiety or depression (Kvam et al, 2007).

We also have concerns about BSL users suffering from a lack of, or poor, interpreting services because many NHS Trusts have a contract with non-specialist interpreting services who do not know BSL users' needs or who they prefer to have as their BSL/English interpreter. Many of these non-specialist interpreting service providers also charge excessive fees. We would like the NHS to move away from this model – which would save money – and allow BSL users a real choice.

BSL users must be included in the design and provision of BSL/English interpreting services. BSL users must be the advocates for our needs and services – including a robust complaints procedure about an NHS service. They need to be more involved in forums or focus groups, both as individuals and through representative organisations about information and services on health issues. They can advise on whether access to a central place online with health information/health promotion materials in BSL would be useful. This will include signposting to further information and services.

If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Health, Mental Health and Social Care section, please tell us:

Everyone should have equal access to effective mental health services. It is important that the Scottish Ministers take on board the feedback from BSL users to improve access to mental health information and services.

As many as two in three Deaf people in the UK struggle with mental health problems, but most find it too difficult to access psychological therapy (SignHealth, 2017). In May 2017, new guidance from the Joint Commissioning Panel in Mental Health (JCPMH) and SignHealth called for an urgent improvement to Deaf people's access to mental health services.

Despite having poorer mental health than the rest of the population, BSL users often come up with barriers when seeking mental health services. The difficulties BSL users face when seeking mental health help are often misunderstood by NHS services, who in some cases assume that booking a BSL/English interpreter is enough. This does not work for some BSL users, and can often make mental health treatments less effective as the three-way conversation can cause stress or misunderstanding. BSL users should be able to choose to see a therapist fluent in BSL or to book a BSL/English interpreter to see a non-BSL therapist. Choices are important to ensure BSL users make informed decisions.

There was a posting on BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group in December 2016 on the issue of access to mental health services. The person posting asked that her identity be protected. This person experienced depression and went to her GP to seek advice about counselling. She requested a Deaf counsellor but her GP said they were unable to help because of budget restrictions. She has fought this illness for six years, needed help and wanted counselling but her GP wasn't aware of any Deaf counsellors and blamed this on budget restrictions. The GP could only help with medication, which she didn't want, so she continues to have flashbacks. She wanted access to a Deaf counsellor, and was aware of one who was available in Edinburgh. She lives in Glasgow so would have to travel to Edinburgh but she would be unable to travel alone because of panic attacks. She started counselling three weeks ago but it's indirect being via a sign language interpreter, which she feels uncomfortable with and she has lost confidence in the process. She would have preferred direct communication with a Deaf counsellor who can sign fluently.

BSL users at consultation meetings also raised concern about mental health services for BSL users in Scotland, as some felt "it is getting worse." As recently as January 2017, a posting on BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group stated: *"There are still Deaf patients with mental health problems not getting the full treatment that is required to support them to recover. I believe if Deaf patients received equal support lives would be saved. More needs to be done. This could happen to you. Being isolated. It contributes to depression, suicide, etc."*

There are many specialist mental health services including CAMHS in England. There is nothing in Scotland. We would like Scottish Ministers to consider the need to provide BSL

users with specialist mental health unit(s) and/or hospital(s) in Scotland. A comprehensive review is required to enable mental health services to be available to BSL users.

There are also limited training opportunities for BSL users to become mental health professionals. The Scottish Government should investigate how this can be remedied including possibly funding Deaf BSL users to attend customised courses for Deaf BSL users in England as a short-term measure until courses specifically for Deaf BSL users were established in Scotland.

Steps need to explore ways in which BSL/English interpreters can develop specialist training to work in mental health settings. Anecdotal evidence from interpreters and service users suggest that BSL/English interpreters need at least ten years of extensive working with a wide range of BSL users in community settings prior to accepting jobs in this very specialist field. When people are ill, they are not able to function and communicate as they normally would. Further, interpreting miscues or repetition are not conducive to Deaf patients and less experienced interpreters may not know the difference between particular utterances which are 'normal' or those which may be symptomatic of the illness the person is suffering from.

Many BSL users also would like to see the return of care or nursing homes for elderly BSL users. One post on the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group in December 2016 said: *"I would like to see the return of care homes for elderly Deaf people. I know lots of older Deaf people are on their own, and it would be good to have one built and have BSL staff. There is always an excuse about money and I'm sick of it. The Government and the NHS should fund it."*

Below are some concerns from BSL users about care or nursery homes:

1. *"I have an elderly Deaf mother in law of 91 who is unable to live independently. We have no choice but to care for her in our own home, which is not ideal for our mental health. But what can we do, as we don't want to put her in a home with hearing people who can't communicate with her. It concerns me so much that we have no specialist home for elderly Deaf people. Something has to be done."*
2. *"I am deaf and I worry about growing old, as I fear that I would be placed in a hearing nursing home with no BSL. This is very concerning. How would I be able to call out for a nurse? How would I be able to communicate my issues? I would not be able to socialise with other elderly people. Frightening stuff. I'm not looking forward to growing old."*
3. *"I know lots of older Deaf people won't accept hearing people working with them, like Cordia Home Care. They'd rather work with people who can use BSL."*
4. *"I do worry about the future of older Deaf people. It would be good if they were able to live comfortably in a home where they could communicate in their own language. I don't like care homes, as the elderly are often mistreated and decline fast. This may be due to not having enough staff to sit with people and chat with them. I've seen elderly people sit on their own staring into space. It's very sad and upsetting to see. I do hope that a care home is set up for Deaf people and that staff is able to communicate fluently with service users. Otherwise, what's the point? The government needs to wise up and get this sorted."*

BSL users also need support services that are provided by, and for, Deaf BSL users or by people who can use BSL. Access to services for hearing people is not sufficient to meet their needs. The NHS need to include Deaf professionals in their workforce planning strategy, as we would like the NHS to employ specialist Deaf staff to work with BSL users, and Deaf organisations to employ Deaf advocacy staff to provide cultural and linguistic provisions if BSL users require support to help them find out information, explore options and encourage them to decide for themselves what they want to do. BSL users should be able to choose to receive advocacy services in BSL from a BSL advocate, without needing a BSL/English interpreter, if that is their choice. This is also more cost effective than a hearing advocate using a BSL/English interpreter.

With regard to support groups, BSL users should have the choice of being placed in hearing support groups or have their own support groups where they can have equal access to care pathways and end of life care.

A BSL video of Mark McDonald MSP, Minister for Early Years & Childcare; also Minister responsible for BSL was uploaded by the Scottish Council on Deafness. Mr McDonald, speaking at a NAG meeting in August 2016 said: *"It is important for lead ministers like me with BSL, and MSPs with lead healthcare responsibilities to be aware of the issues affecting the BSL and Deafblind community on a daily basis. I am aware it's impossible to become an expert with only a one-off training session, which was not enough."* This needs to be acknowledged with regard to developing and rolling out BSL awareness training for health and social care staff. One day's training is insufficient to understanding BSL users' needs in accessing this goal.

Our goal for Transport

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

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

Implement the recommendations of 'Going Further: Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework' which has been developed with disabled people, including, including BSL users. Key actions in the framework include:

36. Ensuring that transport users, including BSL users, can participate in the ongoing feedback process of the framework.
37. Researching technological solutions for providing accessible information in transport hubs (like train stations, airports etc.)
38. Creating guidance on how to contact transport providers when things go wrong on a journey.
39. Developing training for transport providers which includes strategies for communicating with BSL users.

7.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Transport?

Yes

7.2 Please tell us why you think this:

Research on possible technological solutions for providing accessible information in transport hubs is needed because BSL users are frustrated about getting on the wrong train or having to change trains without notification or not being aware when things go wrong on a journey. Systems to make public announcements/notifications accessible are needed for BSL users, as transport providers need to take responsibility for completion of a journey, including across different modes of transport.

The majority of BSL users at consultation events expressed frustration about bus drivers, as they sometimes insist on knowing the exact destination where they are getting off. A posting on BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) Facebook group sums up BSL users' frustration: *"I'm really fed up with every bus driver asking me where I'm going. I know lots of Deaf people tell drivers that they're Deaf but the drivers still keep on and on about where they are going."* This appears to be a big issue at consultation events, as many BSL users are fed up and embarrassed about communicating with bus drivers behind a glass screen.

The majority of BSL users at events would like bus drivers to be BSL aware and have an introduction to BSL skills. They want to get information when things go wrong during a journey.

If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Transport section, please tell us:

We welcome the recommendations of 'Going Further: Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework', and would like the Transport Accessibility Steering Group to engage with and involve BSL users in their ten-year lifespan of the Framework, in particular, implementing the four outcomes:

- More BSL users make successful door-to-door journeys.
- BSL users are more involved in the design, development and improvement of transport policies, services and infrastructure.
- Everyone involved in delivering transport information, services and infrastructure will help to enable BSL users to travel.
- BSL users feel comfortable and safe using public transport – this includes being free from hate crime, bullying and harassment when travelling.

BSL users have suggested potential solutions to these ongoing problems: a list of destinations behind drivers' windows so they can point to where they are going. Will this be an effective way of discreetly communicating with BSL users? BSL users want to 'travel with the same freedom, choice, dignity and opportunity as other citizens.' (Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework, 2016.)

We also support Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework's suggestion that all of those involved in and around transport need to view BSL users as both a key customer group and an excellent source of information when improving their services, not just in the way these are provided for BSL users themselves, but for everyone especially with regard to researching technological solutions for providing accessible information in transport hubs.

As mentioned in the outcomes, BSL users need to be involved from the start of discussions in the design, development and improvement of transport policies, services and infrastructure. For example, First Glasgow have introduced a range of cards which allows disabled passengers to discreetly communicate a problem to their driver but it appears that BSL users had not participated or been consulted in this process – <http://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/glasgow-news/communicating-bus-driver-can-nightmare-12271188>.

In the meantime, a simple solution was suggested by BSL users which could be easily instigated now, obviating a ten-year wait, is to have a separate National Entitlement card for Deaf BSL users, which will allow them to immediately and discreetly convey their status with bus drivers.

Culture, Sport, Leisure and the Arts

Our goal for Culture, Leisure, Sport and the Arts

BSL users will enjoy fair and inclusive access to Scotland's culture, leisure pursuits, sport and the arts and will have every opportunity to share their own Deaf culture with the people of Scotland.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

40. Encourage BSL users to take part in the culture, leisure, sport and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals.
41. Support professional pathways and advocate for BSL users to consider culture, leisure, sport or the arts as a potential career choice.
42. Encourage the integration of BSL in the performing arts and film.
43. Work with the bodies delivering culture, leisure, sport and the arts to ensure that websites are easy to access and inclusive for BSL users.
44. Increase the number of public events and arts programmes that have BSL interpretation.
45. Work with Historic Environment Scotland to introduce British Sign Language tours in historic buildings in order to improve access for BSL users.
46. Work to ensure that everyone is empowered to access and participate in Scotland's culture. The new Cultural Strategy will be owned by the people of Scotland and will be co-created with artists, cultural producers and anyone else with an interest across the sector and beyond.
47. Work with sportscotland to provide information on their website about good practice when working with BSL users and increase awareness and understanding about BSL.

8.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Culture, Leisure, Sport and the Arts?

Yes

8.2 Please tell us why you think this:

There was a posting on BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) in July 2016: *"I was on Alcatraz Island today and was very impressed with the device which enabled me to access the guided tour. All presenters in the video were Deaf and there were subtitles. This is what I would like to see; every place of interest to have the same service in Scotland."* This is one example of how access to BSL could be provided in places of interest.

If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Culture, Leisure, Sport and the Arts section, please tell us:

There was also a suggestion that our national anthem – ‘Flower of Scotland’ could be signed at the start of the Six Nations rugby matches. That would be promoting the use of BSL, as the Act requires.

BSL members from the Glasgow area would like to continue the work of Glasgow Museum's efforts to ensure BSL users enjoy access and services across the city's museums. BSL volunteers have been trained to offer guided tours, and BSL users need to be aware of this new service.

More training opportunities using the Glasgow Museum's efforts to train BSL volunteers and staff should be encouraged to become BSL guides. If BSL users consider this pathway as a potential career choice, they should be able to access training opportunities so that they can host BSL tours. BSL users would prefer guides to be well educated in this field so that BSL users can enjoy public events and arts programmes. In addition, there should be BSL videos in museums.

Models of projects elsewhere could be useful on access to these goals. For example, the monthly-guided tours specifically designed for Portuguese Sign Language users in partnership with museums. On the first Sunday of every month at 3pm, the tour includes a Portuguese Sign Language interpreter – http://www.tnsj.pt/home/template_new.php?intlID=9&intSubID=69.

There should be an access to funding for Scottish BSL athletes to represent their country at local, national or international events. We want to see Scottish BSL Athletes with talent and commitment to be provided with financial support to represent Scotland and/or the UK.

Our goal for Justice

BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

48. Assess how the justice system could better meet the needs of BSL users and carry out a plan of improvements.
49. Look at research on technologies which aim to improve BSL user access to our Justice systems.
50. We will ensure that appropriate guidance and resources are developed by the justice sector to improve understanding of and response to BSL users (this could include BSL awareness training and the development of guidance for BSL users on what they can expect in justice settings).

9.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Justice?

Yes

9.2 Please tell us why you think this:

From the consultation events, BSL users did not feel they were receiving equal treatment and more could be done with the police and justice departments in terms of BSL awareness training. For example, handcuffing BSL users behind their back when they are trying to use BSL.

Concern was expressed about the interpreting or/and translation skills required to work in court settings; for example, specialist training to adjust language skills to meet the communication needs of Deaf prisoners, offenders, suspects, witnesses or victims.

Concern was expressed about police officers struggling to find BSL/English interpreters for police interviews and follow-up interviews. BSL users have the right to be provided with interpreting and translation support at all stages of the legal process – including choices and preferences with regard to sourcing BSL/English interpreters. There should be a clear response about whether a BSL/English interpreter will be provided at interviews, as this has created frustration among BSL users.

BSL users' experience of police interviews was dependent on the relevant police officers' attitudes (e.g. whether they made wrongful arrests or wrote notes as opposed to booking BSL/English interpreters).

If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Justice section, please tell us:

Deaf relay interpreters or Deaf Intermediaries or Deaf Advocates are suggested as new solutions, as was the involvement of Deaf people in the legal process to give support with interpreting and translation.

The BDA feels more could be done with regard to information, resources and training about the legal process; for example, about reporting a crime or what to expect as a witness going to court on websites and social media.

BSL users did not feel they were receiving equal treatment during court proceedings, as BSL/English interpreters were not allowed to interpret/translate other criminal cases in court whilst they were waiting to be called up to the stand. Other hearing peers can hear and learn what to expect when called up on the stand. This needs changing to give BSL users equal access as other hearing peers.

We would recommend specialist training for BSL/English interpreters, police forces and justice departments could ensure the integrity of the legal process is not compromised.

BSL users trying to use legal aid faced barriers. We would like the Scottish Ministers to look at how legal aid can help address inequalities, promote social justice and improve BSL people's lives. BSL users' experiences of legal aid need to be shared to help them make their recommendations to the Government. Examples would include: how easy it was to find out about legal aid, the amount of aid they could get, what they could use it for, things that they needed but which were not covered by legal aid, and about how accessible the legal aid was to use. We would like to ensure that BSL users respond to the Scottish Government's 'Programme for Government' action to: *'engage with the legal profession and others to identify during this year specific measures to reform Scotland's system of legal aid, maintaining access to public funding for legal advice and representation in both civil and criminal cases alongside measures to expand access to alternative methods of resolving disputes.'*

The issues of accessing funding for BSL/English interpreters for solicitors' service needs to be resolved. Some BSL users are being charged for both the solicitor's service and that of a BSL/English interpreter who was needed to facilitate communication. There is no consistent approach to funding BSL/English interpreters. One solution would be a central fund which BSL users could access to cover BSL/English interpreters' costs.

In relation to resources being developed by the justice sector. Models of good practice or projects could be useful to reference about access to justice. For example, Police Scotland is already starting to improve access to their services. On the Police Scotland website they are posting information in BSL that has been signed by police officers. The feedback from the BSL community is positive.

With regard to BSL awareness or skills training, it has been suggested a different approach is

used. Individual fees are expensive if you are going to send one person at a time to course providers who charge per person. One solution is to employ someone part-time or full-time or have a small team of BSL teachers who could teach the police across a number of courses and levels. The same practice could be applied to local authorities or other groups who could join forces and have a local BSL teacher covering adjoining councils. This would create more jobs and opportunities for BSL users, and keeps costs sensible. They will be more productive with improved local contacts and better police-community relations.

Models of good practice or projects elsewhere like Police Link Officers for Deaf People (PLOD) in England could be replicated in Scotland.

A focus group for BSL users to give feedback to the justice sector would support with this goal. BSL users' experiences in prisons can be found here – <https://bda.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BDA-Deaf-Prisoners-Report-2016.pdf>

There is a need to highlight the importance of safer communities for older BSL users. Information from, for example, Trading Standards Scotland (TSS) and Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) with a responsibility for tackling doorstep crime, scams, falls and illicit trade is not accessible. Many of our concerns relate to older BSL users not feeling safe in their community. Provision of information on tackling harm to older people, falls prevention and the role of emergency services (police and fire and rescue services) need to be accessible.



Democracy

Our first goal for Democracy

BSL users should be able to represent the people of Scotland as elected politicians at a national and local level, and to serve on boards of our public bodies.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

51. Assess whether the Access to Elected Office fund met the needs of BSL users. This pilot fund offers support to cover additional costs, like BSL/English interpreting, who wish to stand for selection or election in the 2017 local government elections.
52. Offer advice and support to BSL users about how to participate in politics and to political parties and organisations about how to be more inclusive of BSL users.
53. We will raise awareness of public appointments as a way to participate in public life. We will make sure that the boards of public bodies know about BSL and the BSL National Plan and what they need to do.

OUR SECOND GOAL FOR DEMOCRACY

BSL users should have full access to information about democracy, including voting.

By 2023 Scottish Ministers will take these steps:

54. Provide better information about voting in BSL and review whether it has been effective.
55. We will encourage political parties to produce election information in BSL.

10.1 Do you think these are the right steps under Democracy?

Yes

10.2 Please tell us why you think this:

These are the right steps but more needs to be done for BSL users.

All the political parties supported the BSL (Scotland) Bill when it went through parliament debates and parliamentary questions, as they wanted to make sure that it became an Act. This needs to be followed through. A question from a NAG Member (representing BSL) asked Mark McDonald his thoughts of the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015). Here was his answer: *"All political parties agreed to support the BSL (Scotland) Act from the beginning, which is a rare sighting as there are usually debates. There was no objections to this Act, so it means the BSL community will benefit from this strong support rather than being stuck in between debates from all*

political parties.” There needs to be a consistent approach and support with regard to this goal for democracy.

We are aware that BSL users regard training and support as a priority and there is evidence of a lack of awareness, confidence and skills in relation to citizenship and civic participation. BSL users want training about how to participate in politics and to political parties and organisations about how to be more inclusive of BSL users.

BSL users should have the same access to public life as anyone else. According to Inclusion Scotland – *‘Disabled people are woefully under-represented in public life and particularly in politics. In the 2015-17 UK Parliament only half a dozen or so MPs out of 650 (1%) identified as disabled people, yet we make up 20% of working age people. The Scottish Government’s Access to Elected Office Fund is not available to support candidates for election to the UK Parliament.’*

The BDA agree with step no.51 – that Scottish Ministers look into financial support to BSL users standing for election at a national or local level, or allow the Scottish Access to Elected Office Fund to be used to support Scottish candidates for election. Expenditure for BSL/English interpreting should be excluded from a candidate’s campaign spending limits.

The BDA agree with the second goal for Democracy, as BSL users should have full access to information about political parties, for example, BSL manifestos for the political parties. Any adjustments in terms of audio, easy read and Braille should include BSL at the same time. It is a cornerstone of a civic/democratic society. Excluding BSL users is curbing democratic functions, as BSL users find it hard to digest English manifestos. Some BSL users do not vote because information from political parties is inaccessible. When they browse through a website to find out more about politics and it is full of English text, how can they access that information? It needs translating in BSL.

Each political party should employ BSL experts to support their work with the BSL community, and employ BSL/English interpreters for public events.

10.3 If there are any additional steps, or potential solutions that you think could be added to the Democracy section, please tell us:

The EUD INSIGN project – <http://www.eud.eu/projects/past-projects/insign-project/> tested a system to improve access to democracy for Deaf people. From their home computers, people across Europe could contact their Members of the European Parliament – directly, via specially trained interpreters.

Feedback from BSL users also indicates that there is lack of access to political/press conferences and public announcements in BSL. Public events/press conferences and in TV broadcasts should be accessible to the BSL community. For example, BSL/English interpreters should be available at election or leaders’ debates. There were concerns about the location and framing of BSL/English interpreters on TV, as they were not clearly visible. BSL/English

interpreters should not be used as tokenistic participation. This service needs to become routine practice. How will BSL users access information at the same time as everyone else? Equality is not about providing access after public events have taken place – it is about anticipating who needs the information and making sure it is accessible.

Public service, state or emergency announcements should be in BSL. There are examples of good practice by other countries – public announcements with BSL interpreters or Deaf Relay interpreters in vision and often next to the official spokesperson are a matter of routine in the United States, Australia and New Zealand. This would require further progress, such as a requirement for political parties to provide BSL access at public events/press conferences and in TV broadcasts.

Any other comments, evaluation and next steps

11.1 Are there any other comments you want to make on the BSL National Plan that you haven't already told us?

There is a need for an independent and safe place for 'comments, compliments and complaints. This should include regular feedback to services as the officially appointed 'agent'. BDA Scotland is ideally placed to undertake this role as a BSL/Deaf-led organisation with its founding aim of protecting BSL and BSL users.

Ongoing reviews by any of the bodies, which are required to adhere to the National Plan and the BSL (Scotland) Act (2015) must be embedded and encouraged in the National and Local Authority Plans. However, as been reported elsewhere in this response, feedback from BSL users at the BSL consultation meetings indicate continuing problems with, or marginalisation from, the services to which are entitled. BSL users have also reported on the limitations of services provided by just one supplier or contractor including restricted choices and poor quality levels as a result of not having other suppliers to choose from.

This independent, almost, Ombudsman of you like, would strengthen the intent of the National and Local Authority Plans and would reassure Deaf BSL users and others such as family members that there is a process which will assist both parties and obviate any delays or actions. The National and Local Authorities Plans cannot wait six years for a review, improvements or actions.

11.2 How did you find the experience of responding to this consultation?:

The questions 'Yes', 'No', and 'If Yes, why?' are unhelpful. we want to say 'Yes' yet add something. Or, we want to say 'No' but not because we're unhappy with the content, more that we would like to add a comment to offer a solution.

We were a little surprised that, after significant publicity, so much feedback and the establishment of the NAG, this was all that was produced. It feels like we are re-submitting much of what was stated during the BSL Bill phase.

The wording in many parts of the Draft National Plan is unclear. This is especially true of the sections on Employment, Public Services and some others.

Please, when the final plan is drafted, make it clear, test it and pilot it with a group of Deaf BSL users. It has been difficult to see so many say they don't understand it – in whatever format – and that they haven't felt able to contribute or engage with the Plan. We are worried about the Local Authority plans and the level of engagement there will be for those.

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.

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.

- 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 as a human right. As such, BSL 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 community.



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

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