

BSL briefing for Janet

BSL (Scotland) Bill

Currently working its way through Parliament. It places a responsibility on Scot Govt to prepare a National Plan for BSL (a bit like the National Plan for Gaelic). Listed “Authorities” must also prepare their own BSL plan within a year of the publication of the SG plan (again like their Gaelic Language Plan). SQA do not appear, at this stage, on the list of “Authorities” (see appendix). We are presuming the reference to “post 16 education body” relates to colleges and universities? The main driver for the act seems to be the lack of qualified BSL interpreters and the negative impact this has on deaf people accessing public services.

Use of BSL in assessment arrangements - National Courses

Deaf candidates who use BSL are permitted to access their SQA assessments using BSL and to respond using BSL with the exception of (i) the assessment of reading and writing in English and (ii) the assessment of reading, writing, talking and listening in Modern Languages, Gaelic and Gaidhlig.

BSL Qualifications

SQA currently offers a group of stand-alone Units which enable candidates to learn and develop their skills both receptive and productive in BSL. These Units at SCQF levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. The Units at levels 4, 5 and 6 were fairly recently refreshed. We also created assessment support packs for these Units with accompanying signing videos (all on the secure site).

SQA also has a PDA in Deaf Studies (SCQF level 8). The Award has been designed to develop skills in BSL at SCQF level 8 as well as developing knowledge and skills in the Linguistics of British Sign Language, Scottish Deaf History and the Community and Culture of Deaf People. The award is aimed at a variety of individuals who may work or aspire to work in an environment that requires the use of BSL skills at an advanced level. Again this has extensive assessment support including a range of video clips with signing.

Current uptake for both Units and the PDA is very low.

A National Course in BSL?

Over the last few years there have been a few representations to SQA and enquiries from the Media re whether we are intending to develop National Course provision in BSL. In particular, representations have looked for parity of provision with other Modern Language National Courses.

Our position has been that we already have Unitised provision up to SCQF level 6 which can be used in any Senior Phase offering to enable candidates to develop skills in BSL which they can use for both social and employment progression purposes.

Other factors to consider include:

BSL is not referenced as a language in the CfE Experiences and Outcomes – the only reference is as an alternative means of communication for all subjects. Although it is referenced as a language in the Scot Govt 1 + 2 Languages policy.

BSL involves 2 modes (receiving and giving) compared to Modern Languages which develop 4 skills (reading, writing, speaking and talking) – the modern language arrangements would not automatically “fit” BSL. Just assessing the 2 modes would result in a much “lighter” qualification than the existing MLs

Unit provision has a very small uptake at present.

For whom would any National Course provision be aimed at – learners (including candidates who are not deaf) or deaf candidates who may have been using BSL from an early age? Same issue we have with minority languages and Gaelic.

Who would be qualified to teach a National Course? Most BSL or signing instructors are not qualified teachers. Would teacher training Institutions add this to their range of subjects? How would such teachers be deployed?

The cost of BSL assessment support is significant as all materials normally need to be signed – as well as having translators at all development meetings. Given initial uptake for such provision would likely be low we would need specific grant funding to both develop and deliver such provision.

The main awarding body in the UK for BSL is an organisation called Signature – they have a wide range of BSL provision covering all levels – the British Deaf Association also has a range of BSL qualifications. Signature have been campaigning actively for a GCSE in BSL – they are currently developing a draft specification for this (which they have not shared with others) and are aiming to pilot this with 6 centres this coming year with a view to getting the specification officially approved by Ofqual to offer to all centres in 2016/17. If we did go down the National Course route – we potentially could use this work as a starting point.

One potential way forward is to consider the creation of an “Award” (rather than National Course) provision in this area – possibly adding to the existing BSL Units with provision around the history and culture of BSL. This could sit with our existing Awards that have been developed to support CfE and the senior phase which are gaining increasing uptake and recognition.

Appendix - LISTED AUTHORITIES referenced in the draft BSL (Scotland) Act

Audit Scotland.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland.

The Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

A council constituted under section 2 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 (c.39).

A Health Board constituted under section 2(1)(a) of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978.

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

The Police Investigations and Review Commissioner.

A body which is a “post-16 education body” for the purposes of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005.

The Scottish Commission for Human Rights.

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service.

The Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Scottish Information Commissioner.

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

The Standards Commission for Scotland.