



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Annex A

British Sign Language Plan

2025–2031

Consultation Report



Consultation report

Respondents gave their views on the new BSL Plan's 21 proposed actions through:

- Attending in-person consultation events (127 participants)
- Completing an online survey on Citizen Space (27 participants)

Whilst there is limited benchmarking data for consultation response levels, the response rate compares well with our Gaelic Language Plan 4 consultation, which received 124 responses.

This document sets out the method used to gather feedback and then the feedback gained.

Overall, the consultation supported our actions. It has prompted us to sharpen and clarify a few actions and consolidate two. It has given us ideas for including in the delivery plan that will be developed in 2025 and reviewed annually during the life of the plan.



In-person consultations

To counter potential digital exclusion in the BSL community, the BSL Communities Officer (BCO) delivered a series of in-person consultations which provided BSL users with an accessible route to give their views in BSL. This was in addition to using English through the online consultation and helped remove language barriers.

The consultations took place from 6 August 2024 until 10 September 2024, with the BCO visiting a number of Deaf organisations and Deaf clubs around Scotland:

- **Ayrshire Deaf Club**
- **British Deaf Association (Scotland)**
- **Central Scotland Deaf Hub**
- **Deaf Action**
- **Deaf Communication Service**
- **Deaf Services Lanarkshire**
- **Forth Valley Sensory Centre**
- **Lanarkshire Deaf Hub**
- **Tayside Deaf Hub**

Geographically, the consultations took place at:

- **Coatbridge**
- **Dundee**
- **Edinburgh**
- **Falkirk**
- **Glasgow**
- **Kilmarnock**
- **Kirkcaldy**
- **Motherwell**

The BCO also met with Deaf BSL users from Shetland and Inverness, at the Scottish Parliament in-person and through an online video call, retrospectively.

In total, 127 participants contributed feedback in person towards the new BSL Plan, with the vast majority being Deaf and Deafblind BSL users.

The consultations were promoted through:

- a. BSL videos fronted by the BCO, which were shared through the Parliament's BSL Facebook group, external BSL Facebook groups and organisations' social media channels.
- b. Posters with QR codes providing BSL translation which were put up physically in venues, and shared on social media.
- c. Emails to organisations and Deaf clubs.



Online consultations

Respondents – representing MSPs, MSP staff, Scottish Parliament staff, contractors, and the public, including the BSL community – were invited to give their views on the BSL Plan’s 21 proposed actions through completing an online survey.

- The online consultation was open from 8 July 2024 until 22 August 2024 using an online questionnaire on Citizen Space which was BSL accessible with the inclusion of BSL videos.
- The online consultation generated 27 responses in total from individuals and organisations.
- A multi-channel promotional campaign was carried out using paid for marketing, social media channels, internal communications, direct communications, and third-party communications.

Response rate and responses

The online consultation received a total of 27 responses.

Of the responses:

- a. 10 were from groups and organisations.
- b. 17 were from individuals including members of the public, along with 6 internal responses (from MSPs/MSP staff, Scottish Parliament staff and contractors working in the Scottish Parliament).
- c. 13 of the 27 responses were from native BSL users or those fluent in BSL, including one response by BSL video.



Consultation responses

Combined feedback from the in-person and online consultations demonstrated widespread support amongst respondents for the draft BSL Plan 2025–2031.

There was strong support for the inclusion of all 21 proposed actions in the plan, with feedback being provided for each.

A detailed breakdown of key takeaways from feedback for each action are as follows:

Action 1:

Retain BSL interpreting of First Minister’s Questions (FMQs) and parliamentary business directly relating to the Deaf and Deafblind communities.

Feedback:

- This action received strong support. It was highlighted that it is important to cover a wide range of topics, not just those that directly relate to the BSL community.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - the process of acquiring tickets for First Minister’s Questions could be made more accessible for the BSL community.

Action 2:

Retain an open dialogue with BSL communities about when and how we provide parliamentary business in BSL.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - How to make SPTV’s broadcast channel more BSL friendly.
 - Some respondents said that the previous format of two BSL interpreters on screen simultaneously for FMQs provided a more authentic and engaging experience instead of one visible BSL interpreter.
 - The idea of providing BSL resources that summarise parliamentary business, such as key points from a debate for instance.



Action 3:

Encourage public involvement in our work through welcoming and inclusive facilities and services developed with Deaf and Deafblind people.

This includes work in:

- Visitor experiences
- Arts and culture experiences
- Health and safety procedures
- Capacity building within Deaf and Deafblind communities for BSL users to be active contributors to the shape and content of our products and events

Feedback:

- This action was supported. It was commented that by including and celebrating Deaf and Deafblind people in the Parliament's arts and culture experiences, it will serve to empower and inspire the BSL community, and in particular Deaf and Deafblind young people.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - A number of suggestions on how to make health and safety procedures BSL accessible, including the use of coloured lanyards.
 - Widespread support was given for Deaf-led tours to be offered by the Parliament, with many highlighting the benefits that this would bring, such as making the content more engaging, relevant, and immersive, and providing increased employment opportunities for BSL users.
 - It was suggested that making visitor experiences truly BSL accessible should encompass every aspect of the experience, for example going through security and checking in at the reception too.

Action 4:

Provide a wide range of digital, online and print information and resources including resources in BSL for:

- Visitors to the building
- Visitors to our website
- Those seeking information from the Parliament (e.g. freedom of information requests, enquiries)
- BSL-based businesses engaging with the Parliament as a contractor or potential contractor
- Videos and materials produced to inform or inspire public engagement

Feedback:

- This action was supported. A recurring theme from feedback is to ensure that BSL users who are digitally excluded can access Parliament's resources. We will add an additional point as we intend to deliver a programme of events developed with the BSL community.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - Yearly in-person engagement activities
 - The establishment of 'Parliament Hubs' around Scotland
 - Many suggestions covering a wide range of topics were put forward on what resources in BSL could be produced.

Action 5:

Always be mindful of the needs and experiences of BSL users in any online work we do. This includes:

- Working in line with best practice for integration of BSL into digital communication platforms such as our website
- Monitoring how BSL develops in the online world over the life of our plan, including the advance of AI and the use of videos and text within webpages
- Maintaining a meaningful presence on the most popular and appropriate platforms of social media so we are engaging in the spaces communities value

Feedback:

- This action was supported
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - While there is good support for the concept of using AI to expand the Parliament's translation and interpreting provision in BSL, there were concerns that AI is not currently able to do this at an acceptable level, but this may change in a few years' time.
 - Many strong views were expressed that the BSL Hub, the Parliament's dedicated website for BSL videos, is difficult to find from the main website's landing page, and to address this, a one-click BSL icon should be added.
 - It was suggested that it would be good to offer both integrated BSL content on the main website and a dedicated BSL website (BSL Hub) instead of one or the other.

Action 6:

Offer educational resources in BSL and respond positively to any requests for sessions or tours to be delivered in BSL on a case-by-case basis.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - Ensuring that the educational tours in BSL on offer are Deaf led.
 - As part of the educational offer from the Parliament, it would be good to provide citizenship training to Deaf young people to help them to become better informed on the Parliament, and what their rights are.



Action 7:

Retain considering BSL user needs from the start as part of developing participation and scrutiny work.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - A strong theme in the feedback has been about ensuring that digitally excluded BSL users are able to take part in participation and scrutiny work, with many suggesting that the delivery of in-person parliamentary engagement can help to make this a reality.
 - It was mentioned that consultations in full, including demographic questions, should always be made BSL accessible, not just topical questions.

Action 8:

Consider BSL interpreting needs for events held in the Parliament that are designed to inform or inspire public engagement on a request, proactive or retrospective basis as appropriate.

Feedback:

- This action was supported. Feedback asks us to specifically mention the consideration of hands-on interpreting for Deafblind people. We will amend the action to include hands-on signing.

Action 9:

Make Scottish Parliament staff recruitment and selection procedures BSL accessible.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - To support with recruiting BSL users, all vacancies should include a clear message encouraging BSL users to apply.
 - For interviews involving BSL users who are Deaf or Deafblind, the panel should always include a Deaf or Deafblind BSL user to ensure that the interviewee's cultural and language needs are fairly considered as part of the interview process.



Action 10:

Create an inclusive working environment for elected members by engaging with MSPs and potential MSPs to understand their requirements.

Feedback:

- This action was supported. Participants recognised the value of bringing in lived experiences of Deaf people that have run for election at local, national, and European levels to ascertain what barriers they faced and how they could be addressed.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - It was suggested that it would be good to focus on making sure the pathway to becoming an MSP is made accessible to BSL users.
 - Feedback included the importance in this work of hearing MSPs and staff understanding more about BSL needs and how to support MSPs using BSL. This is also covered under actions 20 and 21 (which are merging).

Action 11:

Develop further our monitoring and evaluation systems and reports to inform our decisions about services in BSL. In doing so, we will reference the work within the BSL National Plan on using BSL data and key findings from the Scotland Census 2022.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - Results from monitoring and evaluation systems should be regularly publicly reported so as to identify both achievements and areas for improvement. In this way, the Scottish Parliament can act as a benchmark for other listed public bodies under the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.
 - Feedback was that it would be valuable to establish a mechanism for capturing BSL users' views on how satisfied they were with their engagement with the Parliament. Since the work of the Parliament's public engagement services is developed with user experience at its core, feedback and evaluation will be key throughout. Our delivery plan annual progress reports will be published during the plan.
 - The Parliament's feedback, complaints and compliments system must be accessible for the BSL community. There was strong consensus amongst respondents that the BSL community should be able to easily give feedback on the quality of BSL interpreting of parliamentary business – and they should be able to do this in-person, as well as online.



Action 12:

Develop further our networks to exchange good practice and continuously improve. This includes attending BSL conferences and events, and networking with other legislatures and visitor attractions.

Feedback:

- This action was supported. Several respondents said details of such ‘networks’ would be welcomed, and they should maintain an international focus. We will clarify the action as it was apparent that how it was expressed caused confusion as to whether the Parliament was responsible for establishing and maintaining the networks.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - A review of practices in legislatures across the world could help identify ways other countries promote deaf inclusion.

Action 13:

Retain working closely with the Scottish Parliament Gaelic Development Officers to share good practice on language provision and consider joint projects.

Feedback:

- This action was supported. This is useful to ensure symmetry in how services are provided to minority language communities, and how minority language communities are engaged with.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - It would be valuable to make the Gaelic language, history, and culture accessible in BSL for the Deaf BSL community to understand why it is an important part of Scotland’s heritage. We can raise this with the relevant language bodies as well.

Action 14:

Retain providing advice and assistance relating to BSL if requested by the Officeholders supported by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB).

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - Several respondents are supportive of this and suggested that the Scottish Government’s proposed Implementation Advisory Group could support with delivering this. It could empower Deaf and Deafblind BSL users to use and share their lived experiences to advise on BSL accessibility of their responsible areas. We will raise this with the relevant Officeholders.



Action 15:

Expand and promote a BSL Dictionary resource on parliamentary phrases.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - It should be co-designed with BSL users from across Scotland, to ensure that it responds to the needs of people who are Deaf and Deafblind.

Action 16:

Promote BSL services and effective use of Contact Scotland BSL for those who want to use it to contact the Parliament.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Multiple responses noted the great value put on Contact Scotland BSL's service. A lot of the older Deaf and Deafblind community do not have access to the Internet, or are not confident using it, so the Parliament needs to ensure that alternative options are available for those that want to contact Parliament without having to use Contact Scotland BSL. However, continued promotion of the service to both the Deaf community and MSPs is essential.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - It would be advantageous to have a Deaf trainer deliver Contact Scotland BSL training.
 - It was queried whether the Parliament could consider providing a Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) service – such as SignVideo, SignLive or SignWow. This would offer access to a 'live' BSL interpreter when engaging with Parliament's services in person and onsite. For clarity, BSL users can use a Video Relay Service (VRS) service – which in this case is Contact Scotland BSL – when contacting the Parliament from home or outside the Parliament.
 - The use of apps which BSL users value will be explored and adopted where appropriate. The Parliament already supports some apps and we will communicate these to BSL communities.



Action 17:

Retain providing BSL and deaf awareness training to staff, including customised training for targeted staff teams as appropriate.

Feedback:

- This action was supported.
- Multiple responses noted the great value put on Contact Scotland BSL's service. A lot of the older Deaf and Deafblind community do not have access to the Internet, or are not confident using it, so the Parliament needs to ensure that alternative options are available for those that want to contact Parliament without having to use Contact Scotland BSL. However, continued promotion of the service to both the Deaf community and MSPs is essential.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - Several respondents said deafblind awareness training needs to be provided in addition to deaf awareness – such training needs to be differentiated on account of the impact of visual loss. Sensory awareness in general should come into play.
 - It was commented that all forms of training – whether it be BSL classes, deaf awareness, or deafblind awareness – should be led by Deaf and Deafblind BSL users with Scottish dialect knowledge and lived experience, increasing the opportunity for developing the Deaf BSL workforce within the Scottish Parliament.
 - A base level of regular and repeated participation in training on Deaf and Deafblind issues should be an expectation of everyone in the Parliament, including MSPs. There should be a strong emphasis on face to face for such training, with online options available to complement (especially for remote workers).
 - Staff in frontline roles that are potential first points of contact for Deaf and Deafblind visitors (such as Reception staff, café / shop, Visitor Services, Security, etc) should be offered an enhanced level of training with a focus on practical use for their respective staff roles.

Action 18:

Retain providing BSL training to ensure skills to communicate in BSL with a focus on practical use in staff roles.

Feedback:

- This action was strongly supported. Very positive feedback was received from BSL learners among Parliament and MSP staff, both from a personal and professional learning perspective. It was commented from external and internal respondents that normalising BSL by promoting and making it more visible has been very effective.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - A suggestion was put forward that bespoke BSL training could be delivered which focuses on certain topics that hold particular relevance to staff's work remits, such as catering, health, or particular committee work.



Action 19:

Ensure BSL is a regular presence within the internal communications of the Parliament, which will help to normalise the language.

Feedback:

- This action was supported. An internal respondent said that, from their experience of working with Parliament staff, they are very informed and positive about promoting BSL. It was commented from an external respondent that the action point is a valuable step forward in 'normalising' BSL and that making Deaf and Deafblind people more visible in such communications will help to empower them.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - An external respondent queried what this action would mean in practical terms, such as including BSL videos to be sent along with English versions in all emails for instance.

Action 20:

Every two years within the life of this plan, have the BCO attend team meetings of all SPCB offices to deliver presentations on the BSL Plan and communications support and offer some basic BSL training.

Action 21:

Retain including awareness of the BSL Plan in staff inductions.

Feedback:

- These actions were supported. Feedback suggests that merging the actions will better demonstrate our commitment to our work to raise awareness and skills both at induction and throughout the working life of a colleague. We will revise the wording on this basis.
- Delivery plan suggestions which will be considered with the relevant staff included:
 - Several respondents said that, as with any language, people must use BSL regularly if they are to be confident and able to converse competently.
 - BSL and inclusive communication practices should be part of induction, regular training and support offers and should be provided at least annually.



General feedback

We also asked people to raise points that they felt were not covered by our actions and to provide wider feedback.

Parliamentary responsibilities:

- It was raised by external respondents that since cross-party groups do not receive financial support from the Scottish Parliament to provide BSL interpreting, there is a risk of Deaf and Deafblind people being excluded from taking part if external funding is not available. This feedback will be passed along to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointment Committee.
- Concerns were raised that the size and scope of the new BSL Plan would be challenging for the BCO to deliver on their own – with suggestions being put forward of setting up a BSL Advisory Group to help steer the delivery of the Plan, and expanding the Parliament’s BSL team. Whilst this feedback is appreciated, our Delivery Plan involves a large number of offices in the Parliament and is embedded into all offices’ plans. This is largely how we deliver mainstreaming and delivery within existing resources.
- It was suggested that all proposed action points which contains the ‘Retain’ could be changed to ‘Continue’ or similar wording to make it more accessible to the BSL community. We will make this change.
- A respondent said that it would be helpful if the Parliament could report on its accessible communication practices and sensory inclusion, which would go beyond the BSL Plan’s scope. We will raise this with relevant staff.
- A suggestion was put forward for more collaboration between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to support the BSL community to better understand the differences between the two organisations’ BSL remits and functions.:
 - Some of the responses both for this question and throughout the online survey and in-person consultations, commented on matters relating to Scottish Government policy such as education, provision for learners, etc, rather than on matters within the remit of the Scottish Parliament, so they have not been included.

Interpreting community:

- Comments were received about the interpreting community in Scotland and how we might support their development with Scottish dialect BSL.
- It was suggested that it would be good to consider the benefits of having an in-house BSL interpreting team that may ensure more effective use of budget and resources.
- Feedback suggests we need to work with interpreters to build confidence and competence to interpret high-profile, complex parliamentary debates. This could be achieved through induction, training and engagement, working with organisations who employ and train interpreters to do this within best industry practice and to share learning.
- Respondents were keen for us to share feedback from the BSL community with interpreters and support the development of Scottish Parliament BSL vocabulary.

