

## **Summary of Interim National Progress Report 2020 for parents/carers**

### **Introduction**

The British Sign Language (BSL) Scotland Act 2015 came to life in 2017 with local plans being created across Scotland. In October 2020, the Scottish Government planned to review the National Plan and asked all partner organisations (BDA, Deaf Action, Deafblind Scotland and ourselves) to collect data to see the progress of the plan, identify good practice and highlight areas that need to be improved. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the formal progress report was postponed. This report summarises some of what local authorities, parents/carers and young people have told us in the last 12 months.

1. Deaf Learners Conferences and Craftivism
2. Educational support for BSL learners during the pandemic.
3. Focus group and 1:1 sessions with parents on their child's learning journey.
4. Local authority BSL local plans update.
5. Post 'first lockdown' consultation with the NDCS Young Campaigners.
6. Parent Participation courses.
7. What's next?

### **1. Deaf Learners Conferences and Craftivism**

A group of 20 deaf young people and 7 teachers attended from 5 local authorities (Highland, Fife, Dundee, Perth and North Lanarkshire). The day covered:

- Campaigns training (including an introduction to NDCS 'make a change' funding)
- Feedback session on key steps in the BSL National Plan (reflecting on changes since 2015)
- Panel debate session.

The group identified topics that they wanted to explore and provide feedback on:

- Some Teachers of the Deaf have BSL level 1/2 (or higher) but often pupils expect & need more fluency.
- Difficulties BSL users have in accessing information at transport settings.
- Deaf young people accessing educational talks outside of school.

After the sessions young people provided feedback on how things were different now from 2015 (both positive and negative):

- My school has "always had good communication and support from teachers, now I have good support in moving to academy and am making new friends".
- "My friends want to learn sign language and I now have good support in school"

- “YouTube subtitles are wrong and my primary school teacher was horrific”

In our June Conference we also asked young people about their experience of school, they replied:

- “The pupils who are deaf but oral have a voice but want to sign also.”
- “You must learn sign language. Because deaf and hearing people are different but they want to be equal. That is cruel what they did in primary school.”

The Craftivism and Campaigning programme provided young people with information about campaigning and gave them the opportunity and space to discuss their experiences of deafness with other young people in the same situation. Craftivism is a form of gentle activism that uses arts and crafts to raise awareness of an issue affecting an individual or group and encourage positive change (Craftivist Collective, 2018). Craftivism and Campaigning supports deaf young people to feed into local BSL plans and share their views directly with local BSL plan representatives.

Young people taking part in craftivism sessions reflected on differences between now and when the Act was introduced told us:

- “I would like to make a new friend, but they make a fool of me because I am wearing hearing aids”
- ‘I’m having a good time in school and I made a new friends. There’s enough support for me!’
- “It is a challenge for me because I went to basketball club there people can’t sign some and some feel they can sign”
- “My teacher doesn’t understand what Deaf means, they are always against putting on subtitles but also the teacher always has poems that I can’t learn”

## **2. Support for BSL learners during the pandemic: local authority feedback**

We wrote to all 32 Scottish local authorities (LAs) in June asking for feedback on measures they are taking to ensure deaf pupils continue to receive educational support during the pandemic.

17 responses were received. 10 local authorities were undertaking two way video calling with deaf pupils before summer and most who didn’t were seeking agreements for video conferencing for re-opening in August.

Considerations going forward were as follows:

- Further detailed guidance could address issues around accessibility of home learning and remote learning conditions for BSL users.

- Public guidance for supporting young people in future periods of home learning should meet the needs of BSL users who require accessibility to teaching resources and video calls.

### **3. Feedback from Parents' Focus Group and 1:1 Sessions**

We spoke to parents of deaf children and asked set questions relating to their own child's learning journey.

Points raised and considerations going forward were as follows:

- Despite the development of SQA BSL Awards there remain families not currently accessing formal BSL classes in school that would like to do so.
- There are still issues around SQA Prelim exams and whether deaf pupils can answer via BSL.
- There needs to be specific ring-fenced funding to provide BSL interpreters for families to play an active part of their child's school community, including extra-curricular activities.
- Parents have a right to be well informed of their child's rights and the ability to engage in everyday life. Parents should be fully involved in assessment processes that their child goes through. Can professionals receive effective training on BSL culture and awareness to better understand sector specific information that will ensure full engagement with families?
- Parents felt that adopting a whole school environment approach to BSL visibility would be helpful in order for deaf young people to effectively engage in school.
- To ensure that deaf young people are able to engage fully/equally, they must be able to access clubs and activities e.g. scouts, dancing classes etc. with their peers. This includes training staff to use BSL proficiently, or to employ the services of a qualified BSL interpreter.

### **4. Local Authority Feedback: BSL Plans**

In July we wrote to all local authorities requesting updates on their local BSL plans, specifically accessing sign language in the early years and the teaching of BSL within schools as part of the 1+2 policy. The policy states that all children should access learning in English plus 2 other languages e.g. spoken French and BSL.

- 12 responses received to date
- One local authority confirmed they were currently delivering BSL as part of 1+2 language policy
- 8 local authorities currently developing their BSL option as part of their 1+2 language policy

- 5 local authorities confirmed they're providing sign language courses for families in the early years

### Analysis of BSL local authority plans and sign language in the early years

Some local authorities in Scotland support families via free family sign language, BSL courses or provide tuition in the home. We are aware of three local authorities who employ tutors as part of their deaf education service to support families. There is also been some support via speech and language therapy. In other areas of Scotland there is no provision from local authorities. The Scottish Government British Sign Language National Plan (2017-2023) includes commitments on BSL for families. Legislation states that local authorities must create their own plans and should 'try to achieve consistency' with the National Plan, so many have included commitments on family sign language.

**Seven** public bodies (six local authorities and one health board) provide a **firm commitment** to continue or to begin supporting families to access free family sign language within their area. **Ten** local authorities provide **no commitment** to support families to communicate with their deaf child through BSL courses. While the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 may improve provision for some families from local authorities, it is clear that service provision varies throughout Scotland.

### Considerations going forwards were as follows:

- Depending on where you live in Scotland, support families get with family sign language varies considerably. A small number of local authorities offer BSL in the early years through a tutor employed by the service, other local authorities have no offer at all and some areas' charities offer provision. Families in many areas do not have the opportunity to access age-appropriate support in communicating with their deaf child through sign language.

## **5. Young Campaigners consultation**

During August and September 2020 all 16 NDCS Young Campaigners (aged 14-19 years), and their parents, were contacted to gather views on their experiences in lockdown. These were unstructured remote conversations with permissions given to pass details to relevant staff for further support. They focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and services for deaf young people more generally. Their concerns are described in more detail below.

### Health:

- not being able to be seen for an emergency appointment
- parent not allowed to attend; problems communicating with health professionals
- no access to routine audiology care
- being told that access to certain care was not important at this time (attitude)
- struggles with mental health during the pandemic

### Education:

- young people reported lack of subtitles on video content
- no remote/video contact with teaching staff during lockdown due to child protection
- difficulty taking notes while accessing video content
- masks making it difficult to communicate
- worry about schools closing again with future local or national restrictions
- technology that works in the classroom found not to be suitable for use at home.

#### Employment:

- worrying that masks and visors were presenting a barrier to employment
- whether under employed or unemployed at this time, want specialist advice and support.

If your young person is interested in finding out more about the Young Campaigners please contact [anne-marie@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:anne-marie@ndcs.org.uk)

## 6. Parent Participation courses

The course aimed to support parents/carers to become more confident in participating in decision making and campaigning. It was focused on how to get your message across, what opportunities there are to engage with decision makers and how to get involved with these opportunities. This course covered the BSL Act as one of the opportunities to get involved in decision making and influence services in local areas and also went through other opportunities, regardless of communication methods.

Throughout the programme we have supported parent participation courses, here are some quotes from 2019 about the Act:

- *“Learning sign was daunting, especially [when] we were learning whilst teaching our child. Our daughter is significantly happier since introducing sign.”*
- *“There isn’t enough information available about local plans, the course gave a lot of information I wouldn’t have had otherwise”*

## 7. What’s next?

NDCS will be reporting on progress again in October 2021.