

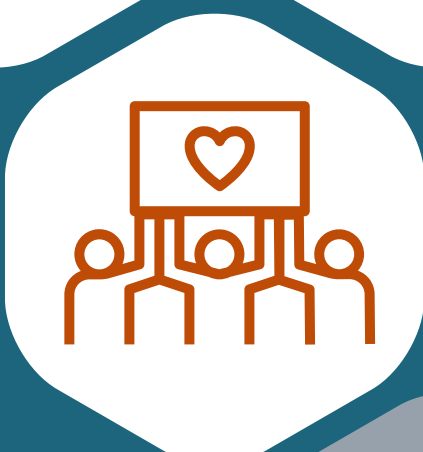
British Sign Language National Plan

2023–2029














Making Scotland the best place in the world for
BSL signers to live, work, visit, and learn.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



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Ministerial Foreword

It is a source of great pride that Scotland holds a significant place in the rich culture and history of British Sign Language (BSL). Moray House at the University of Edinburgh was one of three institutions in the UK that confirmed BSL is a language, and the name 'British Sign Language' was first published from Moray House in 1975. An important cornerstone in the progress that has led up to this point.

BSL is a vibrant and important language, with its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Many Scottish citizens use this language to participate and contribute to our communities, our culture, and our economy. For many deaf and deafblind people in Scotland, BSL is their first language. I am proud that BSL is an integral part of the Scottish language, culture, and heritage.

I am pleased to introduce the British Sign Language National Plan 2023-2029, a six-year plan that represents our ongoing commitment to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn.

**Jenny Gilruth,**

Cabinet Secretary for
Education and Skills

We have focused on ten priority areas within this plan with emphasis on children, young people and their families, health and wellbeing, celebrating deaf culture and tackling accessibility for BSL users that impacts on a number of areas such as transport, democratic participation and access to justice. These priority areas have been developed to respond to the barriers that BSL users have told us are important to them.

Our focus over the next six years will be to deliver actions that will lead to improved equality, opportunities and outcomes for BSL users. This plan will continue to be influenced by other national initiatives and the lived experience and priorities of BSL users.

I would like to thank those who participated in our public consultation on this plan, in particular those in the BSL community. We have worked with representative organisations for the BSL community to better understand the impact of the actions and policies we are proposing. I am clear that this dialogue must continue during the lifecycle of this plan as the priority areas reflect our collective ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, learn and visit.

I am committed not only to delivering this six-year plan but also ensuring that we can make a continued effort in improving the quality of life for BSL users, especially deaf and deafblind BSL users. My aim is to make long-term changes that will deliver positive impact by 2029 and beyond.

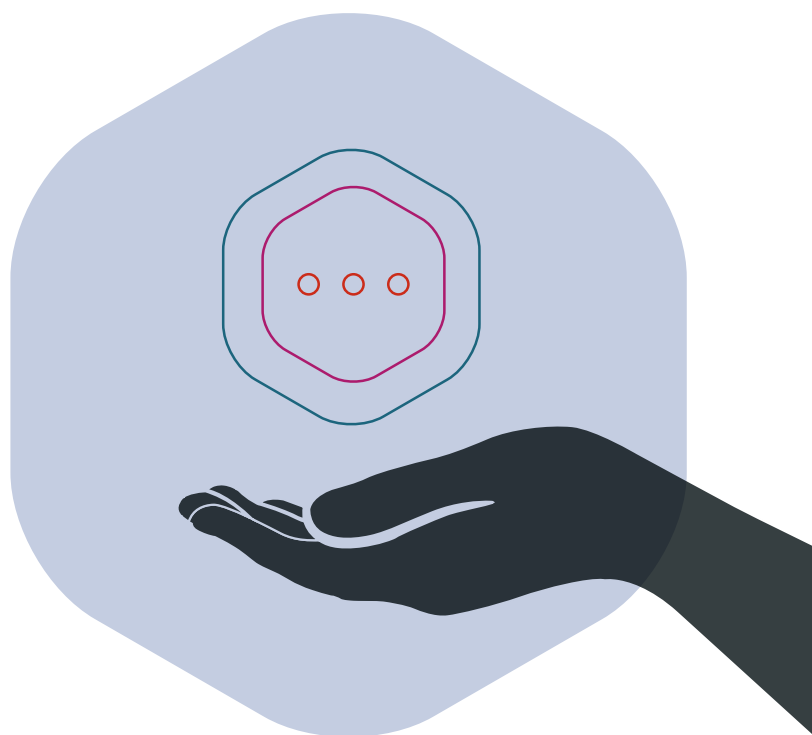
Introduction

The Scottish Government recognises BSL as one of the languages of Scotland that is an integral part in the lives of many Scottish people.

In working towards our ambition to ensure that Scotland is the best place in the world for BSL users* to live, work, visit and learn we must be realistic about the barriers people face in their lives. In our work since the first BSL National Plan 2017–2023 was published, we have identified further priorities based on discussions with the BSL community and the organisations representing them. To tackle barriers effectively, we must consider these in line with work underway in different areas of government and combine our efforts to strengthen the outcomes we want to deliver for the BSL community.

Ensuring equal access, opportunity, representation, and inclusion for all BSL users is a fundamental right for them as Scottish citizens. To inform this plan we held a public consultation with forty three community consultation events. These events engaged the BSL community in a two-way dialogue helping us to capture views in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way. Key themes were identified that we have reflected in this plan's actions.

BSL communities have a rich, vibrant, diverse and unique culture, which this plan recognises. In delivering our ambition, the approach for this plan is to embed BSL in other policies and strategies within the Scottish Government taking a whole-system approach to developing the actions we have set out. In doing so we will promote a greater understanding about the BSL community, leading to improvements in accessibility, inclusion, and increased awareness across public policy.



We recognise to deliver our ambition there must be continued collaboration with the BSL community in Scotland to help us understand the impact of the actions within this plan and refine our approach to ensure they remain fit for purpose. We will establish an Implementation Advisory Group for this plan, providing accountability on the actions and utilising the experience of the group to strengthen delivery. We will publish a progress report at the midway point of this plan's inception to update on the work attached to each action and the outcomes delivered.

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 requires listed authorities in Scotland to publish plans every six years, showing how they will promote, and facilitate the promotion of the use and understanding of BSL in Scotland. These plans will take account of local circumstances and consider how best to respond to BSL users' needs within local communities, organisations or services.



The Scottish Government will continue to work with listed authorities to share information and knowledge across the system to inform local plans as the actions within the BSL National Plan are delivered.

In our second BSL National Plan, we have refined our focus of the actions to address the systemic issues that have been identified as key barriers to making Scotland the best place in the world for a BSL user to live, work, learn and visit. To combat these, we have identified ten priority areas. Each come with a set of actions designed to embed BSL further within wider government policy and thinking, helping to overcome barriers faced by BSL users.

* Throughout the plan, we refer to 'BSL users'. This covers all people whose first or preferred language is BSL, including those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss. We also accept that the majority of BSL users are deaf and deafblind, as well as the fact that there are many deaf and deafblind people who do not use BSL. This plan will differentiate where appropriate whether an action is applicable to those who do not use BSL.

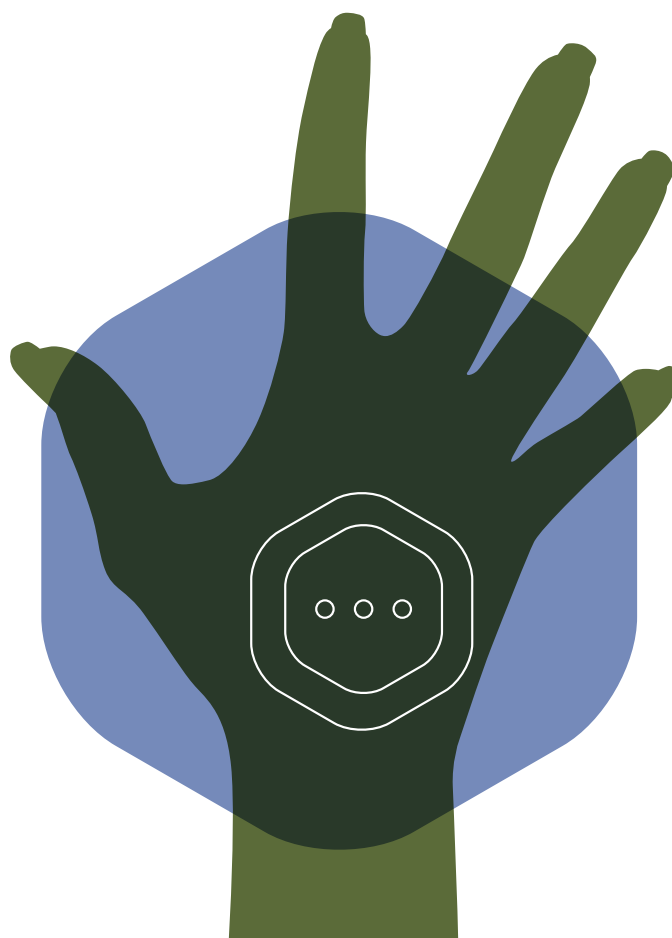
Executive Summary

To deliver our ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn, we have developed a number of actions under the following ten priority areas:

- 1. Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023–2029**
- 2. BSL Accessibility**
- 3. Children, Young People and their Families**
- 4. Access to Employment**
- 5. Health and Wellbeing**
- 6. Celebrating BSL Culture**
- 7. BSL Data**
- 8. Transport**
- 9. Access to Justice**
- 10. Democratic Participation**

Each of the priorities has a mix of short-, mid- and long-term goals that will be delivered in the six-year life of this plan that will build the foundations required to meet our longer term ambition for BSL in Scotland.

The actions proposed within this plan contain a package of commitments and measures that work together to address the ten identified priority areas. Our approach to embed BSL further in other relevant government policies, plans and strategies is at the core of our thinking as this provides an opportunity to address the barriers faced by BSL users in their daily lives.



The information below summarises the intention in each of the priority areas:

- **Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023–2029** – We will embed the ambition of this plan within other government areas in order to make progress across the system. Our Implementation Advisory Group will provide oversight to this work, championing the voices of those with lived experience.
- **BSL Accessibility** – We recognise that BSL communities are underrepresented across organisations and services in Scotland. We want to promote and develop sustainable approaches to ensure that BSL users have access to opportunities and services impacting on their daily lives, ensuring they have information in the right format and at the right time.
- **Children, Young People and their Families** – We will embed our commitment to Getting It Right for Every Child to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time.
- **Access to Employment** – We will embed the principles of No One Left Behind, our all-age approach to employability to enable BSL users to consider what route to employment is right for them to enter into the workforce and fulfil their potential.
- **Health and Wellbeing** – We know person-centred healthcare involves providing access to and delivery of services that are equitable. It is important to ensure that BSL users have the relevant information and services they need to make informed choices on their health.
- **Celebrating BSL Culture** – We work with partners to ensure BSL users have access to and can participate in the cultural life of Scotland, enabling them to celebrate their own culture and heritage.
- **BSL Data** – We recognise the need to build an evidence base and gather data on BSL in Scotland, which will help inform our work in delivering this BSL National Plan and inform local plans.
- **Transport** – We will work with our partners to embed BSL further within our transport system to ensure safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport is available to BSL users.
- **Access to Justice** – We will take steps to ensure BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland.
- **Democratic Participation** – We will deliver actions that will help BSL users participate in democratic and public life in Scotland, recognising that accessibility and information are key drivers in helping to achieve this aim.

Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023–2029

The BSL National Plan 2023–2029 (the Plan) will span six years. The Scottish Government commits to the actions within it, starting from the time of publication by creating the right conditions required to facilitate the discussions, learning and sharing of knowledge required to improve outcomes for BSL users in Scotland.



Our long-term goal:

To improve outcomes for BSL users by embedding BSL in relevant Scottish Government policies, plans and strategies in order to develop solutions to the barriers faced by BSL users in their daily lives.

We will:

01

Establish a BSL National Plan Implementation Advisory Group with representatives from the BSL community to help us deliver the actions within this plan and make the cross-cutting connections required to progress BSL equality in Scotland. This plan will not be static, the ambitions set out within it requires flexibility and leadership to respond to opportunities and challenges. Collaborative working will help us achieve this aim.

02

Work with listed authorities and the BSL community to establish best practice, share knowledge and improve the development and implementation of BSL local plans, as required by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

03

Develop the inclusive communication regulation as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) review, to ensure inclusive communication is embedded proportionately by listed authorities when communicating with the public.

We will engage closely with public bodies, equality advocacy groups and people with lived experience, including our partner organisations, to further develop this proposal based on consultation feedback. It is our intention that any new duties would come into force in 2025.

04

Develop guidance on BSL access for public engagement, including quality assurance of BSL translations. This guidance will be primarily developed for the Scottish Government, we will share learning on what works well with our partners.

05

Publish a progress report on the actions in 2026, the midway point for this plan. As a living plan, this will enable us to reflect on what further actions are required to help us meet our longer-term goals and overall vision for BSL in Scotland.

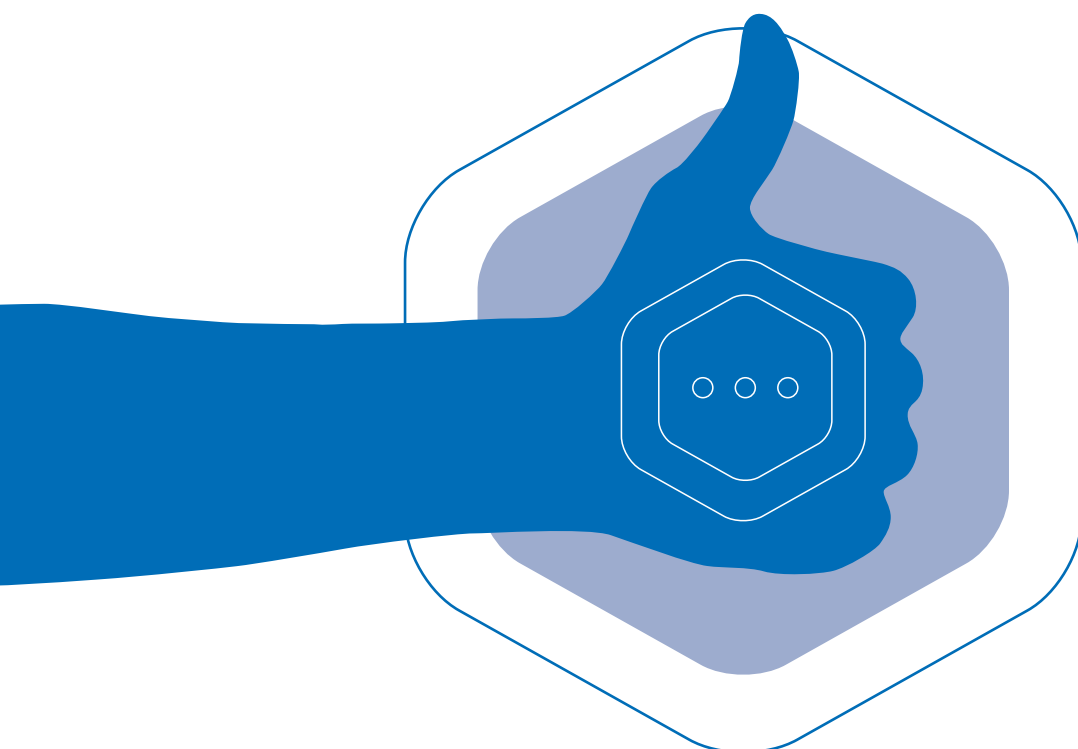
In addition to the work being undertaken by the Scottish Government, listed authorities covered by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 are required to publish their own BSL local plans. As such, individual bodies may commit themselves to other specific actions to promote BSL.

BSL Accessibility

For many BSL users, BSL is their first language. The Scottish Government recognises that for public services to be truly accessible for BSL users, there should be awareness around the culture of BSL, providing vital information in BSL, and enabling people to access services using their own language.

This can be achieved through a wide variety of actions, and therefore this plan focuses on ensuring that BSL users lived experience are actively informing how we deliver services across Scotland.

Accessibility is a thread that runs through this plan given it is a key barrier that impacts BSL users in their daily lives. This plan links to other key pieces of work across government in order to address these barriers.



Our long-term goal:

To remove accessibility as a barrier for BSL users in all aspects of life, recognising the importance of having accessible information in the right format at the right time, utilising technology and increasing people’s awareness of communication tools.

We will:

06

Improve accessibility of the Scottish Government website for BSL users. Information should be in a readily accessible format and be consistent across the platform. We will strengthen our guidance and share our learning across the wider public sector to help increase accessibility standards for BSL users.

07

Ensure that deaf and deafblind BSL users are included in the See Hear strategy as part of the wider group of deaf people, with a focus on living a good life, and the BSL National Plan continues to address equal access to BSL in all spheres of service delivery.



08

Continue to promote the use of Contact Scotland BSL, Scotland’s BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service, making improvements to this service to ensure it meets the needs of BSL users.

09

Implement SignPort and promote its use as an online portal for BSL/English interpreter bookings which will be launched for public use, within the Scottish Government and other public bodies. SignPort is expected to be launched for public use in Spring 2024.

Children, Young People and their Families

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) is our commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time. This is so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential.

We want all children and young people to live in an equal society that enables them to flourish, to be treated with kindness, dignity and respect, and to have their rights upheld at all times.

Our ambition is to work together with children, young people, families, organisations and communities to make Scotland the best place to grow up. Through GIRFEC, everyone in Scotland can work together to build the scaffold of support children and young people need to grow up loved, safe and respected.



In working towards this commitment, we recognise the need to develop a clear pathway for deaf and deafblind children that helps promote the use of BSL at each stage in their education journey helping to maximise their potential at school, ensuring that have the right support to engage with BSL. Parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child's education.

Our long-term goal:

The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a deaf or deafblind child and their family offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL. We will strengthen partnerships between relevant organisations to overcome barriers for BSL users and deaf/deafblind children to ensure they have the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential.



We will:

10

Facilitate the building of partnerships and effective working relationships between NHS teams and BSL providers. This will help to ensure that deaf and deafblind children and their families can access the right support from the earliest stages of childhood and in doing so we can strive to get it right for every child.

11

Engage with stakeholders across Scotland to identify and mobilise a network of BSL providers.

12

Work with representative groups across Midwifery, Health Visiting, Family Nurse Partnership, Allied Health Professionals and Audiology to help them understand the importance of BSL provision on child and family wellbeing.

13

Support NHS teams and BSL providers to develop robust referral pathways which will result in deaf and deafblind children accessing both the healthcare and language learning support they require.

14

Consider the needs of those who are deaf and deafblind in our response to the Independent Review of Audiology Services in Scotland which was published in August 2023.

15

Continue to support education authorities who have duties to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils, including those who are deaf under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. This includes the presumption of mainstream which enables children to learn in an environment that best suits their needs. Families are supported through the Scottish advice service for additional support or learning, Enquire, that receives funding from the Scottish Government.

16

Support opportunities for early years workers to learn BSL up to the level of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6 to inform our future work in this area. SCQF Level 6 BSL is offered by Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and is equivalent to Signature's BSL Level 3.

17

Support opportunities for teachers of the deaf and teachers working with deaf and deafblind children and young people in obtaining qualifications up to SCQF Level 10. SCQF Level 10 is equivalent to Signature Level 6 in BSL, which is the highest possible qualification available as of October 2023. SQA's highest qualification in BSL is Level 4, which is equivalent to SCQF Level 8 and Signature Level 4 in BSL.

18

To work with the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) to explore and facilitate pathways for BSL users to obtain Qualified Teacher Status.

19

Develop education as a priority theme within this plan's Implementation Advisory Group, to explore access to BSL and teaching of BSL.

20

Support the development of opportunities for deaf and deafblind children, young people, and their families, to learn about the heritage and culture of BSL, especially in Scotland.

21

Introduce Scotland's first National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy in this Parliamentary term to ensure there is a joined-up approach so all disabled young people can experience a supported and positive transition to adult life. The Scottish Government BSL Policy team will ensure that BSL users' lived experience is fed into the development of the strategy.



Access to Employment

No One Left Behind is our all-age approach to employability support in Scotland. Support is available to all who need it, though it is aimed at supporting those further from the labour market.

Helping people into fair, sustainable jobs is central to achieving the Scottish Government's vision for a wellbeing economy and delivering on the ambitions in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET – March 2022) and in tackling child poverty as outlined in Best Start, Bright Futures (March 2022).

In partnership with Local Government, we aim to build an employability system that tackles inequalities in Scotland's labour market by creating a more responsive, joined up and aligned employability system that meets the needs of employers and the local labour market helping support people on their journey towards, into and within employment.



This complements our approach to Fair Work that is underpinned by the principles of equity and equality of opportunity for all regardless of any individual or group characteristics. People from all backgrounds should receive appropriate advice and support to be able to consider what route to employment is the right route for them, and employment outcomes are improved. Fair work practices are crucial at both individual level for worker and employer outcomes, and at a strategic level for Scotland's economic performance. By achieving equality of opportunity for all to access and progress in work, Fair Work can drive productivity, release untapped potential and inspire innovation.

Our long-term goal:

BSL users will receive person-centred support to develop their skills, consider what route to employment is right for them and enter into the workforce so that they can fulfil their potential, and improve Scotland's economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career.

We will:

22

Develop opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, helping them understand the support available to them and develop their skills. This will include how to work with BSL/English interpreters.

23

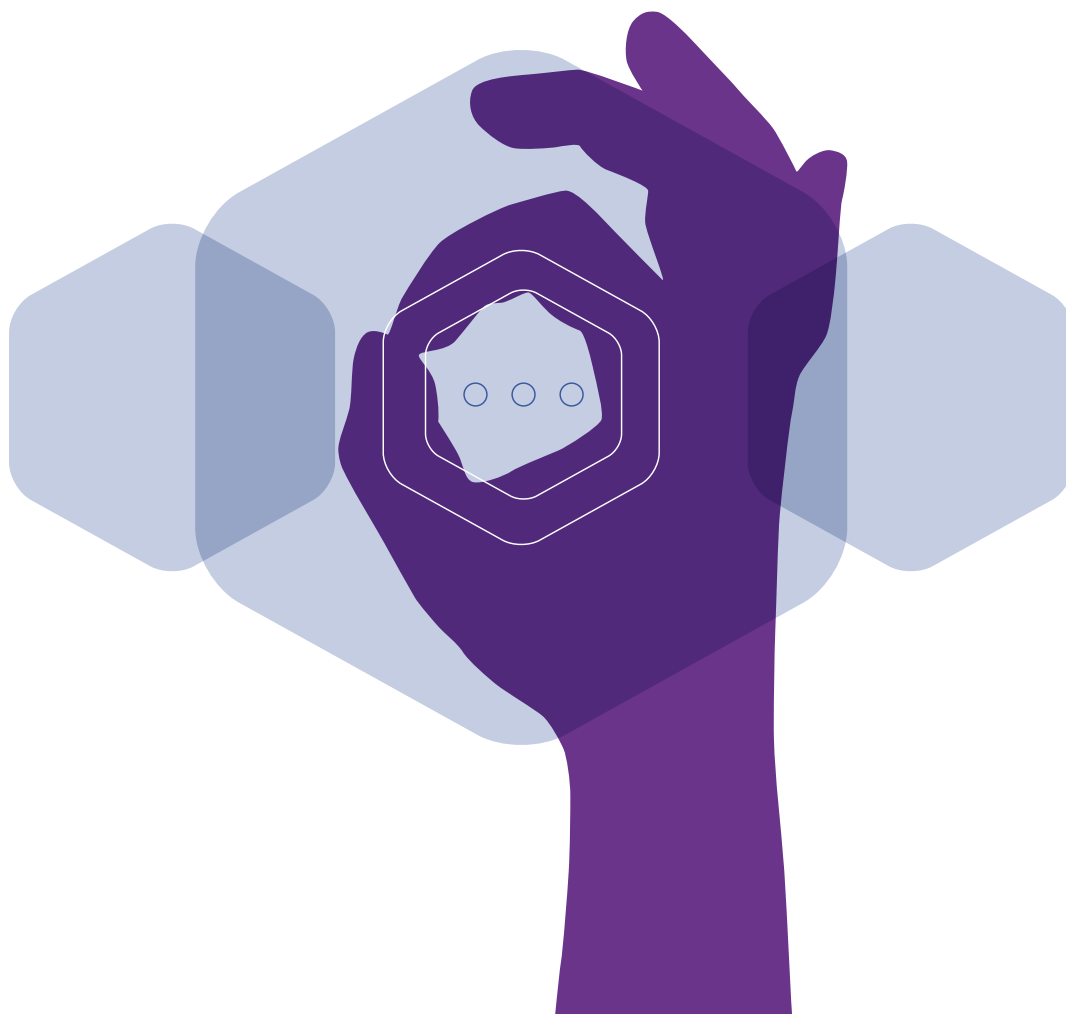
Through No One Left Behind, deliver place-based employability services which support individuals to overcome structural barriers to entering and sustaining employment. We will work with the Implementation Advisory Group for this plan to identify solutions to specific barriers for BSL users accessing devolved employability support.

Health and Wellbeing

Under the law, patients who are BSL users are entitled to the same health and social care access as their hearing peers, in their first or preferred language.

NHSScotland is committed to providing high-quality healthcare services that are person-centred, safe and effective. Good communication is a vital component in delivering high-quality healthcare and in enabling equitable and inclusive access to services and health information.

NHSScotland have put in place an interpreting, communication support and translation national policy that enables service users to fully participate in their care, express their needs, feel understood and make informed decisions, improving the service users' overall healthcare experience.



Our long-term goal:

BSL users will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make informed choices at every stage of their lives.

We will:

24

Develop health as a priority theme within this plan's Implementation Advisory Group, to explore barriers around access and develop solutions to address them.

25

Ensure that co-design on the development and implementation of the National Care Service involves BSL users.

26

Work with our partners to implement and measure our core mental health standards. This will include a focus on ensuring information and services are accessible to all individuals, including those who use BSL.

27

In line with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Action Plan, we will improve equality, inclusion and diversity training for the mental health and wellbeing workforce, including to promote existing BSL training to the workforce.

28

Promote and support the learning of BSL as a second language for hard of hearing, deafened people and people at risk of a second sensory loss. People at risk of a secondary sensory loss should be better equipped with tools for them to communicate. Learning BSL as a second language provides an opportunity for this.

29

Capture the learning from projects such as Deafblind Scotland's BSL Café Project, funded by the Scottish Government, that supports people who are at risk of a second sensory loss to acquire further communication skills by teaching them BSL.

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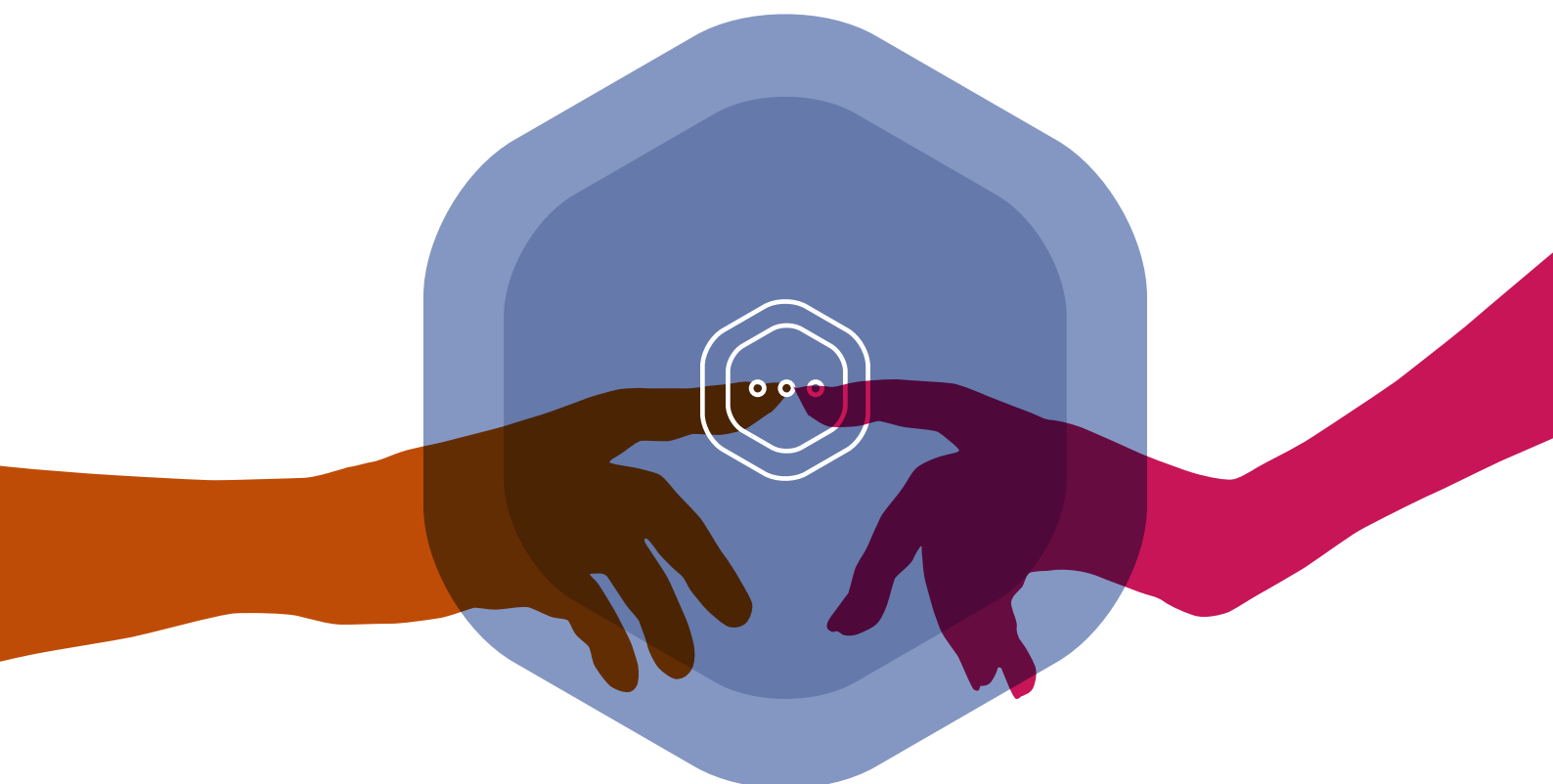
Build on the work set out within the social isolation and loneliness strategy, Recovering our Connections 2023–26, to embed actions related to BSL users and link with existing work at a local and national level to address issues of social isolation and loneliness, including access to services and projects.

Celebrating BSL Culture

Culture can improve the life chances of all people at every stage in their life. In Scotland, culture can be an important element to help reduce poverty and mitigate its impacts.

However, not everyone is able to benefit from it equally and more needs be done to support equal opportunities to access, participate and develop a career in the cultural and creative sectors. We also recognise that BSL is enriched with its own culture and history, and it would not exist without deaf and deafblind people. Therefore, we recognise that BSL and deaf culture are intertwined.

Creative Scotland prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion within artistic and creative activities. They support a diverse range of creative people, communities, and activity, promoting an equality of opportunity to create, participate and engage.



Our long-term goal:

BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, and equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and deaf culture with the people of Scotland.

We will:

31

Work with Creative Scotland to help embed BSL further within culture and the arts in Scotland.

32

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

33

Support BSL organisations to celebrate BSL culture and heritage to strengthen the community, share their rich and vibrant culture, and feel more widely valued within society.



We will explore opportunities for children and young people helping to foster greater visibility of deaf role models, the development of a secure sense of identity, and reduced loneliness and social isolation.

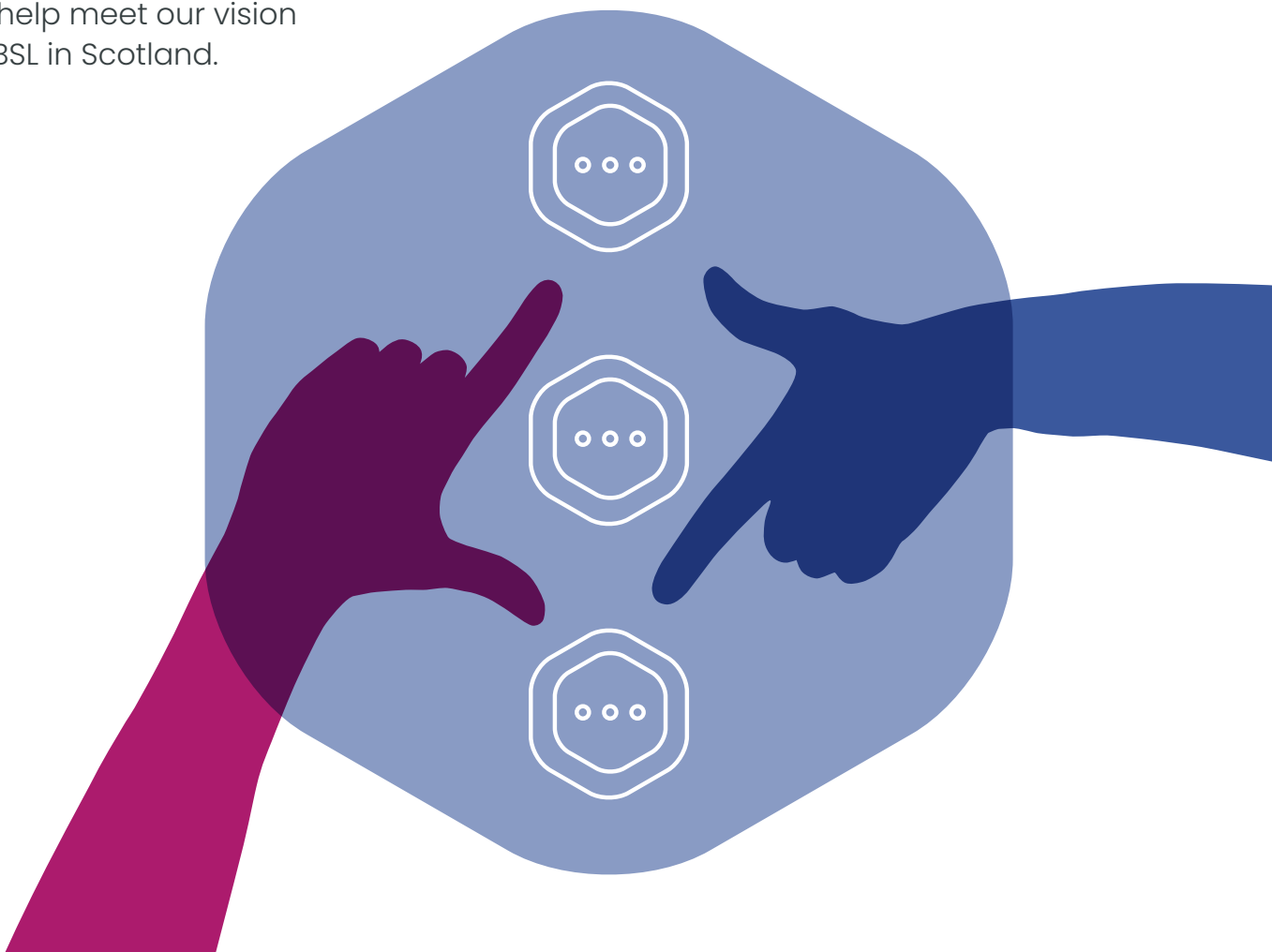
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Identify ways in which the Scottish Government can further support growth for BSL in the heritage, culture and the arts sector, as well as promoting existing workstreams, in line with the aims and ambitions of A Culture Strategy for Scotland.

BSL Data

We recognise that there has been extensive work within academia and the third sector to build up evidence and data around BSL users, deaf and deafblind people, which is essential for informing public policy and shaping services to meet people's needs.

To realise our ambition for BSL, we will strengthen our evidence on BSL users in Scotland. With robust data underpinning our approach to inclusive policy making, service design and delivery, we will help meet our vision for BSL in Scotland.



Our long-term goal:

To strengthen the evidence and data on the BSL community in Scotland to better inform decision making in public policy and service design.

We will:

35

Work with our BSL partners to map out existing sources of evidence available within their organisations and networks, understand the barriers to evidence gathering and agree on the specific and priority gaps in the current evidence base.

36

Gather data and intelligence from projects funded by Scottish Government's Equality and Human Rights Fund and learn what principles can be applied to BSL users that advance equality in this area.



37

Develop and implement a strategic plan for BSL data, building on existing information and research, to set out how we will better understand the BSL community in Scotland relating to demographics and language use, as well as explore issues such as accessibility and access to services.

Transport

Transport Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework for Scotland focuses on supporting disabled people's rights by removing barriers and improving access to travel.

The framework also ensures disabled people are fully involved in work to improve all aspects of travel. We know not all BSL users identify themselves as disabled but like disabled people, access to, and confidence in, public transport is important.

BSL users, particularly those who are deaf and deafblind, should have access to the right information at the right time in order to make public transport more accessible for them.

Our long-term goal:

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

We will:

38

Work with Transport Scotland, using the principles of the Accessible Travel Framework, to improve transport services for BSL users.

39

Work with Scotland's transport delivery bodies – rail, ferry, air and bus operators to collaborate and identify practical solutions to make public travel more accessible for BSL users.

Access to Justice

Our vision is for a just, safe and resilient Scotland. Issues of Justice affect us all. Justice is the concept of fairness. We must be able to exercise our human and civic rights, in order to live in a just and fair society.

Our long-term goal:

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

We will:

40

Continue discussions with the BSL Justice Advisory Group, with the aim to regularly review the progress on actions within Justice around BSL and to mainstream BSL into other Justice workstreams.

41

Develop the provision of BSL intermediaries, also known as intralingual professionals or advocates, for BSL users going through the justice system to inform work to be taken forward to support this provision.

42

Support public bodies within the justice sector in exploring ways in which BSL support can be accessed more efficiently for frontline work and emergency response services.

Democratic Participation

The Christie Commission principles – a focus on people, performance, partnership and the prevention of harm – continue to shape the Public Service Reform agenda in Scotland. At the heart of this is the recognition that no single actor can achieve transformational change alone, and that people should be involved in and able to influence the decisions affecting them.



Ensuring that public services are delivering what people need to improve their lives and outcomes remains a vital driver of reform. There is broad acceptance that this means significant changes to the ways that policies and services are developed and implemented, with the role of partners, stakeholders and the people affected evermore vital.

Our long-term goal:

BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians and as board members of our public bodies.

We will:

43

Develop participation as a key theme within this plan's Implementation Advisory Group to deliver a set of resources that provide ongoing support for BSL users participation in democratic life.

44

Work with COSLA and the Scottish Parliament to identify existing barriers in support for BSL users within political settings, such as councillor or MSP, and consider ways in which gaps can be addressed, including learning from the 2022 Access to Elected Office Fund.

45

Facilitate BSL support in electoral campaigns and the election process to ensure BSL users can make informed decisions with access to all relevant information.



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British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015



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Accessibility Notice

British Sign Language (BSL) and Easy Read translations can be found on the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 website at <http://bsiscotlandact2015.scot/bsl-national-plan-2023/>



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