

# Deaf Action submission of 2 March 2022

## PE1867/F - Establish a new national qualification for British Sign Language (BSL)

We would like to thank the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for seeking Deaf Action (DA)'s views and that we support the proposal, although we believe it should go much further for the reasons below;

There is potential with the proposal to develop both an embedding of BSL into the classroom activities in primary schools, via classroom teachers, and simultaneously increase the pool of deaf tutors who can deliver BSL as subject specific courses in schools. Some primary schools employ specialist teachers for science or languages, and a similar approach could apply for BSL. This could be delivered on a Local Authority basis.

Classroom teachers could embed BSL as part of the learning of various topics, but only with a robust package of training materials and support. A local authority employed tutor for BSL could support schools to deliver this, whilst also providing a monitoring function to ensure accurate sign language use in classrooms. BSL does not currently have the publicly available resources that other spoken languages have from which teachers can check pronunciation and articulation of signs, and there is a risk of other signed languages being taught (such as American sign language or the communication system Makaton).

The embedding of BSL into primary schools as a normal tool for teaching all topics would assist more children from varied backgrounds, languages, disabilities and undiagnosed learning barriers to access education. Current multi-modal methods of teaching can only be enhanced by the addition of a visual, kinaesthetic language to assist with learning and expressing new concepts.

Including formalised BSL teaching into schools who have this foundation of multi-modal learning would be a natural progression for pupils to develop their linguistic competences. This does not need to be an 'either/or' approach; BSL can enhance current teaching practice in primary schools whilst also being offered as an option for qualification and specific linguistic skills development.

Headlines:

DA believes there is an appetite for increased provision of BSL in schools, as evidenced by the increase in enquiries for BSL lessons from the public. We suggest that a two pronged approach would be the most effective implementation of the spirit of the Act, with both an embedding of BSL into the everyday teaching within Primary Education and clear routes to qualification throughout the school journey.

The introduction of basic BSL at Primary level will increase the appetite for qualifications at Secondary level.

Embedding BSL into the curriculum would go a long way to addressing inequalities for deaf people in everyday life.

Current numbers of qualified tutors are insufficient, and investment and planning are required to address this for deployment into schools.

Effective resources need to be developed to support teachers to deliver quality BSL as an embedded language tool for general teaching.

Consultation with existing networks of Deaf Teachers in Scotland, Teachers for Deaf, Parents and Deaf communities needs to be undertaken to get the provision right for all.

We hope that the committee would find this helpful and ask if we could be kept informed of the progress.