

Scottish Sensory Hub submission of 17 October 2022

PE1867/H: Establish a new national qualification for British Sign Language (BSL)

Thank you for contacting the Scottish Sensory Hub to seek our views on the action called for in petition PE1867: Establish a new qualification for British Sign Language (BSL) - Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to establish a national qualification in British Sign Language (BSL) at SCQF Level 2.

The Scottish Sensory Hub, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, acts as an umbrella organisation for the Scottish sensory sector. We fully support the development of recognised British Sign Language (BSL) qualifications with equivalences within the national qualifications framework.

The BSL National Plan and many Local BSL Plans i.e. The Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan makes mention of access to BSL courses, particularly within Secondary School course options. It is of importance that any BSL qualifications are accorded equivalence with other spoken language qualifications. Currently, students earn more University entrance points for spoken language qualifications than they can for BSL. Therefore, will often reluctantly opt for spoken language courses, in order to maximise university entry opportunities.

Nonetheless, BSL is always a popular option for students and people more generally. The language is beautiful, practical and applicable in many settings. The principle of universality and equalities-based, everyone learning it is woven into the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.

BSL is a 'living language' which requires, like any language, access to learning it from a wide spread of people. Without routes to learning BSL from disparate and diverse communities and groups there lies a risk in BSL becoming ghettoised.

The Scottish Sensory Hub believes that there is a strong demand for BSL qualifications amongst the general population and particularly those with Deaf people in their family and/or friendship networks. Indeed, increasing the fluency of BSL in the general population would enhance the inclusion of Deaf people in every-day settings and wider society.

The Scottish Sensory Hub, in its first few months of operation, received enquiries regarding access to BSL courses on a regular basis. Following the participation of Rose Ayling-Ellis in *Strictly Come Dancing*, we received a substantial surge in enquiries regarding access to BSL courses/qualifications. The creation of recognised BSL qualifications, would provide quality-assured, consistent access to qualification pathways. This would thereby create the potential to increase the level of BSL fluency within the general (hearing) population. This may lead to various improvements for Deaf people. For instance, it may lead to an increase in hearing individuals who go on to become qualified BSL Interpreters. At the moment, the ratio of BSL Interpreters to Deaf people is approximately 1 to 186. Therefore, the demands on BSL Communication Support Services are immense, with lack of availability, resulting in the exclusion of Deaf people from various aspects of professional, personal and social life spheres.

The development of BSL qualification pathways and associated increased BSL fluency amongst the general population would enable and enhance the social participation of Deaf children, adults and older people in various aspects of every-day life. The sense of connectedness we all gain from someone passing in the street and bidding us good morning, or simply saying hello, or a spontaneous conversation, all contribute to our wellbeing. Better BSL fluency would contribute positively to the opportunities of Deaf individuals to communicate with others, with direct benefits in terms of connectedness and wellbeing.