

# **British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015**

## **Social Work Scotland response to Scottish Parliament Inquiry**

**2 May 2025**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social Work Scotland is the professional body for social work leaders, working closely with our partners to shape policy and practice, and improve the quality and experience of social services. We welcome the opportunity to provide a response to the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee will be considering the impact of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

The Act led to the development of a British Sign Language (BSL) national plan and listed authority plans. The listed authorities that must produce and implement their own plans for promoting and facilitating the use and understanding of BSL include local councils, NHS boards, colleges and universities, and the Scottish Parliament. The Committee wants to understand if these changes have improved the lives of BSL users and are interested in finding out if any changes could be made.

The Inquiry posed 5 questions. The following document presents Social Work Scotland's response to these.

## **CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1:**

What difference has the BSL (Scotland) Act made to BSL users in the past ten years in terms of progress or setbacks?

Social Work Scotland represent the managers and leaders of the profession. Because we are not directly involved in frontline delivery of services, we cannot offer a fair and informed opinion as we have not consulted with BSL users to ascertain their views.

### **Question 2:**

What are your views on the second National BSL Plan from 2023? Were you consulted on this plan and does it address issues faced by BSL users?

Social Work Scotland and our members see a number of strengths in the National BSL Plan from 2023. We appreciate the emphasis on the importance of BSL as an integral part of Scottish culture and heritage, and we feel that the central ambition of the plan is clearly stated. We recognise the whole-system approach to improving accessibility and inclusion across all areas of society, and we support the emphasis on delivery and implementation, particularly the establishment of a BSL National Plan Implementation Advisory Group.

However, we also see a number of challenges in the plan. We note that specific details in the identified actions are limited, which affects how outcomes are measured due to the lack of KPIs for each priority area. We recognise the focus on early intervention, a factor within social work that members express concern about, given that human and financial resources are depleted and this type of work can often be overlooked as services are diverted towards crisis intervention. Therefore, it would be advantageous if the plan included more detail about required resourcing to ensure this much-needed aspect of delivery can be appropriately implemented.

We believe there could be greater linkage to the Health and Social Care Standards within the plan. Additionally, the workplans produced by Local Authorities are quite general and could benefit from more focus on the impact on services such as social work and social care. The relationship-based nature of work in these professions is instrumental in improving inclusion.

Finally, the National BSL Plan 2023 could be clearer on how Local Authorities implement plans, as well as how the outcomes will be evaluated.

### **Question 3:**

How effective have the BSL plans from listed authorities been in improving outcomes for BSL users?

As a national organisation, we do not have any direct feedback from BSL users as to how the listed authority plans have affected outcomes.

**Question 4:**

What reforms do you think are needed to improve outcomes for BSL users?

From the social work perspective, the biggest challenge is resourcing. We advocate for a shift away from short-term funding towards longer-term strategic plans, particularly for third sector organisations that are often best placed to provide quality, specialist services required by BSL users. We also call for increased resourcing to offer BSL training to professionals, reducing the demand on interpreters and ensuring a truly person-centred and confidential service for end users.

There is often an over-reliance on a very small number of staff who act as links between social work and BSL users. This reliance places significant pressure on these link workers to possess and share extensive knowledge. Social Work Scotland recognises that this leads to varying levels of awareness among social workers regarding SDS, effective communication with BSL users, mental health implications, and long-term conditions impacting BSL services. Therefore, we advocate for a greater focus on training, upskilling, and awareness-raising.

**Question 5:**

Do you have any other comments?

No.

**Neil Gibson**  
**Adult Social Work Policy and Practice Lead**  
**Social Work Scotland**  
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