UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) ACTION PLAN 2018 - 2024**

**1 Introduction**

1.1 The University of Aberdeen is delighted to present its first BSL Action Plan. The diversity of the University’s staff and student communities is one of its key strengths and the University has viewed the requirement to develop a BSL Action Plan as an opportunity to further promote its commitment to creating an inclusive campus and removing barriers to education or work.

1.2 The ambitious draft BSL Plan below sets out the actions the University will take between 2018 – 2024 to review and improve access to BSL users. The Plan confirms the University’s commitment to protecting and supporting BSL, including in its tactile form. The University is proud to have already supported BSL users on campus. As well as meeting the needs of individual students, the University’s graduation ceremonies are interpreted into BSL and the BSL Action Plan below demonstrates a commitment to developing this so that all major University events are accessible to BSL users. Within the University community, there are colleagues and students who have some training in BSL and the consultation has demonstrated that others would value the opportunity to learn BSL. The Plan therefore is set in a context of support and encouragement, with a real commitment to implementing positive change. Although the actions in the Plan are assigned to individual areas of the University, there is an expectation that the University community will jointly support the development and implementation of the Plan.

1.3 The Plan follows the BSL National Plan, published on 24 October 2017, which was developed through extensive engagement with Deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. The actions are framed around the same long-term goals as the national plan, where these are relevant to the work of the University.

1.4 BSL users have been consulted during the development of this Plan in the following ways to date:

* Staff and students who are BSL users or have an interest in BSL comprised a working group to develop the Plan. The working group was chaired by the Vice Principal for People.
* The Aberdeen University Student Association has circulated the draft Plan to the student body
* North East Scotland Sensory Services has circulated the draft Plan to its contacts
* Deaf Action has circulated the draft Plan to its contacts and provided feedback

1.5 The University is committed to continued engagement with BSL users on the Plan and recognises the need to consult with colleagues, partners, specialists and families within the local community. National resources have also supported the development of this Plan and will continue to be consulted.

1.6 The University has worked positively in partnership with local higher and further education establishments to develop a Plan for tackling the challenges associated with BSL accessibility and inclusion in the North East of Scotland and aims to continue working closely with local organisations. There are currently limited opportunities for the training and development of BSL Interpreters in Scotland and in particular in the North East of Scotland, leading to a significant lack of Interpreters available locally. This presents challenges in relation to developing a fully inclusive campus for BSL users. As part of this draft Plan the partner institutions will be lobbying the SFC/Scottish Government to provide incentives for Interpreters to be trained and retained in the North East. Support for additional funding for Higher and Further education establishments to implement their BSL Plans will also be sought.

1.7 A progress report on the National BSL Plan will be produced in 2020 and the University of Aberdeen will contribute to that report where appropriate. Within the University, the implementation of the Plan will be monitored by the BSL Working Group and the Advisory Group on Equality and Diversity, with progress reports becoming a routine feature of Diversity and Inclusion reviews and reporting.

1.8 Staff, students and others can comment on this draft by e-mailing Janine Chalmers, Equality and Diversity Adviser, Human Resources by e-mail janine.chalmers@abdn.ac.uk or by telephone: 01224 273883.

**2 Summary of the BSL Plan**

2.1 This ambitious BSL Plan, is based on and endorses the goals outlined in the National BSL Plan. The University is committed to supporting the implementation of the National Plan and to working with partners in the North East of Scotland to improve accessibility to education, work and leisure activities for BSL users.

2.2 The Plan is framed around ten national long-term goals covering early years and education; training and work; health, mental health and wellbeing; transport; culture and the arts; justice and democracy and the specific guidance for the Higher Education sector. The Plan identifies 20 actions which the University will seek to deliver including:

* Improving access to information and services on campus for BSL users
* Engaging with local and national partners to increase training and support for BSL interpreters
* Engaging with school pupils and their families to ascertain support required
* Ensuring the views of BSL users inform the development and review of the Plan

**3 Action Plan**

This section details the actions we will take by 2024 to increase accessibility of our services to BSL users, increase awareness of BSL and support the implementation of the National BSL Plan.

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| **3.1 Across All Our Services**The University shares the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Steps** |
| 3.1.1 Analyse existing evidence about students and prospective students who use BSL; identity and fill key information gaps so that we can establish baselines and measure progress. | Baseline information established by Sept 2019 | Equality and Diversity Adviser working with Student Support, Registry | Gather internal data Gather national and local data re BSL users and their age – engage with Education Providers  |
| 3.1.2 Improve information and services for students and prospective students who use BSL, including making the website more accessible to BSL users.  | Annual review of progress – first review in October 2019 | Equality and Diversity Adviser working with Student Support, BSL Plan Working Group, Communications, web team | Develop a plan through working with the BSL Plan Working Group and appropriate areas of the University |
| 3.1.3 Identify how the University could promote the use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay services ‘contactSCOTLAND-BSL’, which allows BSL users to contact public services  | December 2018 | Student Support working with Equality and Diversity Adviser | Arrange for a demo of the service at the University |
| 3.1.4 Identify sources of BSL training and consider whether training can be offered to staff/students as a development opportunity.  | October 2020 | Equality and Diversity Adviser working with Staff Development, Student Support | Contact current providers of BSL training to ascertain how the University can work with them to offer training opportunities – initially offer short video tutorials to staff e.g. how to sign simple phrases such as ‘How are you?’ or ‘My name is..’ |

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| **3.2 Post-School Education**The University shares the long-term goal for post- school education set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“BSL users will be able to maximise their potential at school, will be supported to transition to post-school education if they wish to do so, and will receive the support they need to do well in their chosen subject(s)”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.2.1 Review information (and methods of communication) sent to prospective students to ascertain how these can be more inclusive of and accessible to BSL users  | October 2023 | Marketing and Student Recruitment working with Student Support/ Equality and Diversity Adviser | Mapping exercise of current communications |
| 3.2.2 Work towards full access to open days for prospective students who use BSL | October 2024 | Marketing and Student Recruitment working with Student Support | Cost and availability of BSL Interpreters analysed |
| 3.2.3 Promotional videos aimed at prospective students should be available in BSL | October 2024 | Marketing and Student Recruitment working with Student Support | Virtual Campus Tour in BSL to be available on website/social media |
| 3.2.4 Support throughout the student journey for students who use BSL (including completing application forms, interviews, applying for Disabled Students Allowance etc) | October 2023 | Student Support | Would normally be provided on a case-by-case basis, so ongoing monitoring of need to be analysed |
| 3.2.5 In partnership with local partners, review and improve where appropriate the transition process between School and University  | October 2024 | Student Support working with Heads of School/Disability Coordinators | Gather data on current processes/lessons learned  |
| 3.2.6 In partnership with local partners lobby the SFC/Scottish Government for additional funding for BSL training in the North East of Scotland and the development of incentives to retain BSL Interpreters in the North East | October 2019 | Equality and Diversity Adviser/SVP working with Planning/Student Support | Work in partnership with RGU/NESCol and others to develop a proposal |

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| 3.2.7 Promote the development of this Plan (and invite continuous feedback) across the University and using guidance from partners such as Deaf Action, raise awareness of the needs of BSL users | Promote the Plan in October 2018Develop awareness raising material by October 2019 | Equality and Diversity Adviser working with SVP/Communications/Staff Development | Promote the Plan through Staff E-zine, Heads of Sections/Schools |
| 3.2.8 Undertake a Pulse Survey with staff to ascertain level of interest in learning BSL | October 2024 | Human Resources/Communications/ BSL Working Group | Develop a survey – seek ideas of good practice from NESS/Deaf Action |
| 3.2.9 Commit to reviewing/refreshing this plan (based on feedback) after the national progress report (due October 2020) | November 2020 | Equality and Diversity Adviser working with BSL Plan Working Group | Consultation event to be held at ASV in Sept 2018 |
| **3.3 Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare**The University shares the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:**“***The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a D/deaf or Deafblind child and their family offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.3.1 The University has independent on-site childcare facilities for staff and students and commits to working with The Rocking Horse Nursery, to explore how it can work towards being fully accessible and welcoming to parents and children who use BSL | October 2024 | RHN Board of Trustees/Management | Review of current communications/ processes to ascertain what may need to be enhanced/changed to ensure accessibility for BSL users |
| 3.3.2 The University already offers a PG course in Inclusive Practice for teachers/lecturers working at pre-school, primary, secondary and FE stages and commits to exploring how this can be complemented with additional BSL training | October 2020 | School of Education | Recognise the impact and potential Education students will have on raising awareness of BSL. Consult with staff/students in the School of Education to ascertain how BSL could be woven into the training and development of teachers |
| **3.4 School Education**The University shares the long-term goal for school education set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“Children and young people who use BSL will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child’s education; and more pupils will be able to learn BSL at school”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.4.1 Engage with the City and Shire Council’s Education and Childcare Departments to ascertain how the University can support and engage with school pupils who are BSL users | October 2019 | Equality and Diversity Adviser/Student Support | Arrange meeting with the Councils to ascertain how we can work together to deliver on our BSL Plans |

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| **3.5 Training, Work and Social Security**The University shares the long-term goal for training, work and social security set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“BSL users will be supported to develop the skills they need to become valued members of the Scottish 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”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.5.1 Careers Service to consider how its services can be fully accessible to BSL users.  | October 2024 | Careers Service working with Equality and Diversity Adviser | Mapping exercise of services and learning from previous experiences |
| 3.5.2 Ensure that employment candidates who use BSL are able to access the University’s recruitment processes | Ongoing | Head of HR working with Employment Services Manager | Raise the awareness of BSL within Human Resources and with recruiting managers |
| 3.5.3 Deliver disability awareness training, to include issues related to Deafness/Deafblind and BSL to line managers | October 2019 | Head of HR working with Equality and Diversity Adviser | Scope training with HRBPs and include Disability Network Group |
| **3.6 Health (including social care), Mental Health and Wellbeing**The University shares the long-term goal for health, mental health and wellbeing set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“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”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.6.1 Work towards ensuring that health/mental health services (including advice and counselling services) within the University are fully accessible to students who use BSL  | October 2024 | Head of Student Support | Each area within Student Support to devise their own Plans to achieve accessibility |
| **3.7 Transport**The University shares the long-term goal for transport set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.7.1 Consider how the University can work with local transport providers to ensure that travel information is accessible and well-publicised to staff and students.  | October 2024 | Estates and Facilities/Student Support working with Communications/Equality and Diversity Adviser | Make contact with local transport providers to ascertain how the University can work with them to ensure accessibility |
| **3.8 Culture and the Arts**The University shares the long-term goal for culture and the arts set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and Deaf Culture with the people of Scotland”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.8.1 Work towards ensuring that extracurricular/recreational activities offered within the University are accessible to staff and students who use BSL.  | October 2024 | AUSA/Public Engagement/Heads of School/ASV | Each Responsible area to map out the activities they offer and how they could be more accessible to BSL users |
| **3.9 Democracy**The University shares the long-term goal for democracy set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:*“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”* |
| **Action** | **Timescale** | **Responsible** | **First Step** |
| 3.9.1 The University works in partnership with the Aberdeen Student Association to support the student community and commits to exploring with them how student democratic processes e.g. sabbatical elections, class representative elections can be accessible to BSL users | October 2024 | AUSA  | Map the democratic processes to plan BSL user inclusion in advance |

**4 Consultation and Involvement**

4.1 This draft BSL Plan is a living document which can be modified and improved through engagement and consultation. If you have any comments on the draft or would like to become involved in the Plan then please get in touch by contacting the Lead Contact: Janine Chalmers, Equality and Diversity adviser, University of Aberdeen by telephone 01224 273883 or E-mail janine.chalmers@abdn.ac.uk