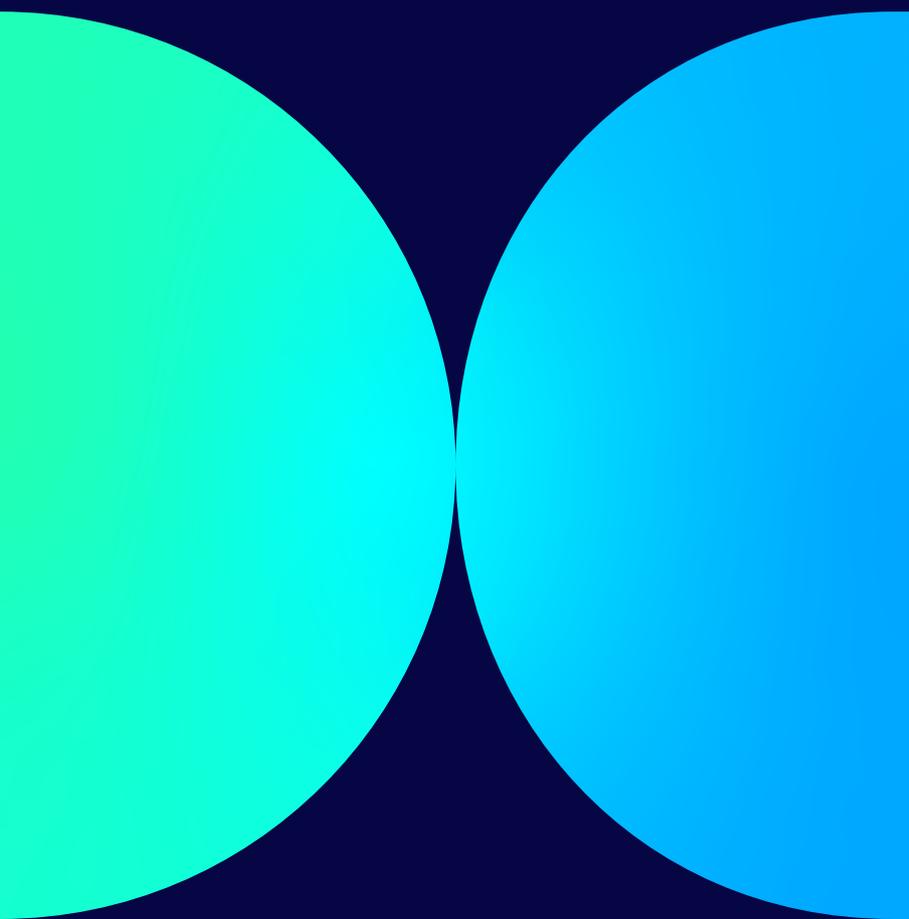


British Sign Language Plan

The Open University in Scotland
2024-2030



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1.1 Background

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 requires all public bodies, including colleges and universities to publish their British Sign Language Plans six months after the publication of the BSL National Plan 2023–2029.

The BSL National Plan was published on 6th November 2023 following extensive engagement with Deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. The Plan sets out Scotland’s ambition to be the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit. It is framed around ten priority areas: Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023–2029; BSL Accessibility; Children, Young People and their Families; Access to Employment; Health and Wellbeing; Celebrating BSL Culture; BSL Data; Transport; Access to Justice and Democratic Participation.

The Open University welcomes the opportunity to publish its second BSL Plan. We are grateful for the support and training provided by deafscotland, the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 Partners and the FE/HE Participation Officer at Deaf Action.

1.2 University Context

Social justice and equality of opportunity are at the heart of everything The Open University does and widening access to higher education is the principle on which it was founded. The Open University is committed to extending opportunities for educational success to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

The Open University is uniquely a university of four nations. The Open University in Scotland is funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. We are proud to support people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications.

As a distance learning provider, the experience of our BSL students may differ from that of a campus-based institution. We ensure the support we offer recognises and responds to our students’ particular requirements. The Open University’s Student Accessibility Policy is published on our website:

help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/accessibility/files/42/student-accessibility-policy.pdf

Information on the additional support currently available for students with restricted hearing and guidance on how to get this support is available via The Open University website:

help.open.ac.uk/deaf-or-hard-of-hearing

The Open University has also developed its own website accessibility guidelines:

open.ac.uk/about/main/strategy-and-policies/policies-and-statements/website-accessibility-open-university

The Open University is committed to supporting the implementation of the BSL National Plan and providing an inclusive service to our students.

1.3 Consultation

A draft version of this BSL plan was submitted to D/deaf and hearing BSL users for consultation, review, and feedback. The OU also participated in discussions with other universities and colleges via the BSL Working Group. We sought guidance from the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council. All feedback was considered and incorporated into the final version of our Plan which has been approved by The Open University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

We have also worked in partnership with Deaf Action on curriculum development and carried out consultation with people from the Deaf community and Deaf BSL users. The themes of this consultation were:

- their needs in terms of fully participation in society
- how they are supported in mainstream education (or not) and
- what kind of curriculum provision would help to alleviate issues that exist in this space

1.4 Name and contact details of lead officer

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1.5 Where to find the BSL version of this plan

The BSL version of this plan is available on both The Open University in Scotland website:

open.ac.uk/scotland

and The Open University's Equality and Diversity website:

open.ac.uk/equality-diversity

Summary of BSL Plan 2024–30

2.1 Overall Aim

This BSL Plan is one of many policies and procedures which the University has in place to support its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. It sets out how The Open University intends to meet the statutory obligations of the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.

Specifically, The Open University is committed to:

- promoting and supporting the use of BSL
- improving access to services for Deaf and Deafblind people
- involving BSL users in developing and providing feedback on our BSL plan
- reviewing this plan, including identifying additional 'local' actions where relevant

2.2 Key Actions

- invite feedback on their university experience from students and staff who use BSL, and provide updates on our response
- promote the use of the Scottish Government's BSL online interpreting video relay service: Contact Scotland BSL
- maintain an online resource for BSL information, including the University's BSL Plan, Contact Scotland BSL details, and links to BSL interpretation services
- provide Deaf awareness training for students and staff and promote access to BSL training
- ensure student information on the University's website is accessible, including key information on academic courses, support services, and our key student policies and regulations
- ensure that students who use BSL are supported throughout their student journey, including study skills, all aspects of learning and teaching, and into training or employment
- ensure key staff information on the University's website is accessible, including key staff policies and procedures
- ensure the University's health, mental health and wellbeing services, and associated information and advice, are accessible to staff and students

Priority Areas

The BSL National Plan is framed under ten priority areas which have been co-produced with BSL users across Scotland. We have structured our BSL plan under these priority areas where they are relevant and support our ongoing commitment to help tackle the barriers faced by BSL users.

3.1 Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023-2029

We share the long-term goal for delivering the BSL National Plan “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”.

By 2030 The Open University will:

- establish an OU BSL Plan Implementation Advisory Group with representatives from across the University to deliver the actions within this plan. This plan will not be static, the ambitions set out within it require flexibility and leadership to respond to opportunities and challenges. Collaborative working will help us achieve this aim.
- work with Scottish colleges, universities and the BSL community to establish best practice, share knowledge and improve the development and implementation of our BSL Plan.
- keep up to date with the Scottish Government’s inclusive communication regulation as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) review

3.2 Accessibility

We share the long-term goal for accessibility set out in the National BSL Plan 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”

By 2030 The Open University will:

- continue to improve accessibility of the OU website for BSL users
- continue to address equal access to BSL in all areas of OU service delivery
- continue to provide accessible information about what BSL users can expect from The Open University
- continue to promote the use of Contact Scotland BSL, Scotland’s BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service,
- continue to evaluate and improve support throughout the student journey for students who use BSL
- promote the use of SignPort as an online portal for BSL/ English interpreter bookings when it is launched for public use in 2024
- keep aware of legislation changes in Northern Ireland and investigate the feasibility of offering students BSL and Irish sign language

3.3 Children, Young People, and their Families

We share the long-term goal for Children, Young People, and their Families set out in the National SL Plan: “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 extend this long-term goal to include post-school education and continue to ensure “BSL users [...], 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)”

By 2030 The Open University will:

- support opportunities for early years workers to learn BSL up to the level of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6. We will do this through our OpenLearn platform and explore opportunities to develop Higher Level British Sign Language Courses in partnership with Deaf Action
- support opportunities for teachers of Deaf students and teachers working with Deaf and Deafblind children and young people in obtaining qualifications up to SCQF Level 10. We will continue to work in partnership with Deaf Action to develop Higher Level British Sign Language Courses
- The Open University’s School of Languages and Applied Linguistics are planning to expand their BSL provision. Working with Deaf Action on the development of a non-accredited BSL level 4 course aimed at people seeking employment where BSL skills are required. It functions as a stepping stone towards level 6, which is a requirement for BSL interpreters.
- support students transition from school to post-school education through our national schools programme: the **Young Applicants in School Scheme** (YASS). The scheme is designed to bridge the gap between school and university, college or employment. It is open to all S6 students across Scotland including BSL users
- continue to provide accessible information about what BSL users can expect from The Open University
- ensure all D/deaf and Hard of Hearing students are supported by The Open University’s disability teams to develop a support profile based on individual need
- continue to provide comprehensive online support, advice and guidance to D/deaf and Hard of Hearing students and prospective students

3.4 Celebrating BSL Culture

We share the long-term goal Celebrating BSL Culture set out in the National BSL Plan “for BSL users to 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”.

As part of its knowledge exchange programme, The Open University in Scotland supports a number of lectures and events at book festivals, arts festivals and science festivals across Scotland.

By 2030 The Open University will:

- ensure the provision of BSL interpreters for graduation ceremonies in Scotland and for key University public events upon request
- take action to ensure that cultural engagement activities offered in partnership with the University are accessible to BSL users

3.5 Data

We share the long-term goal BSL Data goal set out in the National BSL Plan “To strengthen the evidence and data on the BSL community in Scotland to better inform decision making in public policy and service design”.

By 2030 The Open University will:

- 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
- analyse existing evidence we have about students and prospective students who use BSL in The Open University; identify and fill key information gaps so that we can establish baselines and measure our progress
- carry out consultation with BSL users
- investigate the feasibility of including BSL preferred/primary language as a mandatory question across the university on all registration channels
- undertake BSL user evaluation/survey

3.6 Access to Justice

We share the long-term goal Access to Justice goal set out in the National BSL Plan to ensure “BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland”.

The Open University has a suite of free badged online courses on the law in Scotland. The courses – **The Scottish Parliament and law-making**, Scottish courts and the law, **Legal skills and debates in Scotland**, and **Law and change: Scottish legal heroes** – are intended to aid public understanding of the law and legal institutions. These free courses are released under a Creative Commons license and therefore are available to interested organisations to be translated into BSL and made available on the **OpenLearn Create platform**.

By 2030 The Open University will:

- promote the Law in Scotland badged OpenLearn courses to our BSL partners and networks

3.7 Democratic Participation

We share the long-term goal for Democratic Participation goal set out in the National BSL Plan that “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 believe our students, including BSL users, should have the opportunity to be involved in and able to influence the decisions affecting their Open University experience.

By 2030 The Open University will:

- promote ways for students and BSL users to actively take part in opportunities to be involved in university decision-making through the **Student Voice** and events which supports students to express their views and opinions about their educational journey to both the Student Association and The Open University

What happens next?

The Open University is committed to gathering on-going feedback on our BSL plan with a view to publishing a refreshed plan after the national progress report, due in October 2027.

Please contact us if you wish to be involved as we further develop the actions in our plan [see paragraph 1.4 for contact details].



Visit the OU in Scotland website
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