



BSL National Plan 2023- 2029

Consultation Response



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03/09/2023

LGBT Health and Wellbeing is Scotland's largest support service for LGBT+ people aged 16+. With service delivery in Edinburgh, Glasgow and online we support LGBT+ people in improving their mental health and wellbeing as well as providing safer community spaces for LGBT+ people to come together. LGBT Health and Wellbeing runs Scotland's National LGBT+ Helpline which is BSL accessible and affirmative of the needs and experiences of LGBT+ D/deaf people.

Part 1: Key priorities within the draft BSL National Plan

1. (a) What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan: Data on BSL?

Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan.

Please tell us your reasons for your answer

We are in support of a BSL Data Strategy Summary and encourage the Scottish government to work with LGBT+ D/deaf people, those with lived experience and organisations who support D/deaf and Deafblind people who are part of a (or multiple) minority group(s) to develop ways in which data relating to equalities issues is gathered. An issue raised frequently by those in the LGBT+ D/deaf community is the importance of LGBT+ competent and culturally aware BSL interpreters. As an organisation that delivers services for LGBT+ people, we seek to use LGBT+ BSL Interpreters, or those who are knowledgeable of and experienced in LGBT+ issues and LGBT+ D/deaf culture. Oftentimes it is difficult to source interpreters who are either LGBT+ themselves, or work with the community regularly - it would be hugely beneficial to us as an



organisation to be aware of Interpreters who are Equalities competent and experienced in / trained to work with communities that often use different language (e.g. LGBT terms) or signs when communicating.

1. (b) What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan: BSL Workforce?

Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan.

Please tell us your reasons for your answer

We are in support of increasing the number of professionals working within BSL interpreting / tutoring here in Scotland. We'd highlight the importance of reducing barriers of access to certain BSL professions to ensure that communities that access such roles are diverse and representative of the population. Our community members often tell us that they feel most understood, comfortable and affirmed when they see people like them working within services which support them.

In LGBT Health and Wellbeing's "Queering the Signs" Report one of our LGBT+ D/deaf community members shared with us their thoughts around the importance of representation in the BSL interpreter community.

"Allies and allyship are very important. When I go to an event and I see a queer (LGBT+) interpreter, I feel it's a safe space. I feel they understand me a little bit more. There are not enough queer (LGBT+) interpreters and this needs to change." This statement was made regarding the outdated nature of some BSL signs, and the ways in which the LGBT+ D/deaf community have created their own signs for ways in which they describe themselves. Some examples of this include replacing outdated signs (such as signs for trans, gay, gender, ladies and gentlemen etc.) with new, inclusive and affirmative signs.

Our Queering the Signs event highlighted the importance of LGBT+ competent BSL interpreters and those working within BSL professions to the wellbeing of LGBT+ D/deaf people. When discussing the importance of LGBT+ inclusivity in BSL with regards to the outdated or gendered nature of some signs, one of our community members shared: *"We need more [LGBT+ inclusive] training. There needs to be much more and it needs to be out there and available to people. Interpreters need to learn inclusive signs too, not just the LGBT+ D/deaf community. Things need to be more inclusive overall."*



Our LGBT+ D/deaf community members shared with us the impact that the lack of LGBT+ affirmative BSL Interpreters has on their ability to gain access to events. Instances where interpreters have a lack of understanding of LGBT+ culture, pronouns, signs and 'used language' can often lead to LGBT+ D/deaf people feeling misunderstood or distressed, and further isolated when at events. Dignity in access is important to the LGBT+ D/deaf community. By this we mean to be understood, respected and affirmed as who you are in your primary language; without this there is only limited access to public life for LGBT+ people when communicating or receiving information via interpreters. One community member shared their lived experience, stating: *"I think it is best to have an LGBT+ interpreter as the space must feel safe, it is way more likely to feel this way if the interpreter is LGBT+ also. Sometimes straight people can be a bit old fashioned in their views and this is hard. Maybe they don't mean it in a harmful way but this is the outcome."* Our community tell us that the desire for interpreters who are LGBT+ themselves is directly correlated with the lack of interpreters who are trained in / knowledgeable about LGBT+ D/deaf culture. We'd recommend resources be allocated to equalities training to allow those who work in BSL professions who work with (or hope to work with) D/deaf people from minority communities have the confidence and appropriate knowledge to do so. This resourcing will undoubtedly make services more inclusive for D/deaf and Deafblind people who have intersecting identities / are members of multiple marginalised communities.

Our community also highlighted the importance of organisations who do not work principally with the D/deaf community in learning about Deaf culture and BSL. LGBT+ D/deaf community members have shared their experience of 'being LGBT+ in D/deaf spaces' and 'being D/deaf in LGBT+ spaces' with one community members sharing: 'I thought I was split in two, I had to find a way of combining these identities' and another sharing: *"Being Black, Gay and Deaf, I didn't know which order they'd go in but because of BLM, I say I'm Black first."* It's important that spaces that offer support to D/deaf and Deafblind people are equipped to affirm all identities individuals hold, and understand their intersecting experiences. We'd hope to see the expansion of grants which allow for specialised support organisations to gain access to BSL training and upskilling to better meet the needs of D/deaf and Deafblind people who access their services.



A video of LGBT+ inclusive signs created and used by LGBT+ D/deaf people in Scotland can be viewed on LGBT Health and Wellbeing's Website here: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/resource/queering-bsl-signs/>.

The full report for the 'Queering the Signs' panel event can be accessed here: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Queering-the-Signs-Community-Discussion-Report-2022-1.pdf>.

You can read more about our community's perspective via our 'Deaf and LGBTQ+' Event Report here: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Deaf-and-LGBTQ-Discussion-Event-Report.pdf>.

1. (c) What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan: BSL Workforce?

Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan.

1. (d) What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan: BSL accessibility?

Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan.

Please tell us your reasons for your answer

Our LGBT+ D/deaf community members tell us that there is a lack of access to LGBT+ affirmative BSL professionals and interpreters which can lead to a lack of access to events, meetings, services and public life. We've received positive feedback from our community on available services such as Contact Scotland; our community have shared with us that Contact Scotland is helpful on a practical level for arranging appointments and reaching out to services and is generally a very helpful port of call. Despite the support available from Contact Scotland, members of the LGBT+ D/deaf community shared with us the lack of accessibility they experience when trying to access services and support from organisations that are not specialised in delivering services in



BSL.

There is a lack of access to services within the third sector for those who use BSL, especially in instances where confidentiality and privacy are important. Although our community has stressed they prefer 'access (via an interpreter) over no access', they highlighted that their preference would be for 1-1 direct support from organisations in the third sector who are specialised in supporting LGBT+ people and others from minority communities. Our community shared with us that they can oftentimes feel worried about being judged or misunderstood by an interpreter, especially when discussing issues related to LGBT+ identity which can be complex and very personal. Due to this feedback from the community, and funding from the Scottish Government, our LGBT+ Helpline (see link) is in the process of running a Pilot where BSL users can contact the LGBT+ Helpline and converse with a Helpline Handler in BSL directly, without the need for an intermediary/interpreter. Access which respects an individual's privacy is critical to ensure that D/deaf people have the same level of access as hearing people to specialised support services here in Scotland. It is also important that such services are adequately resourced and have longevity and reliability so D/deaf people who are members of marginalised groups can continue to access specialised support.

Our community highlighted the need for resources to be allocated to evolve both the BSL language and related provision to ensure it is inclusive for all. They also highlighted the need for a 'shift in culture' which recognises the importance of access for all, and what access really looks like for the LGBT+ D/deaf community. Below are comments from our LGBT+ D/deaf community members:

- "The advances in BSL need to be taken beyond the LGBT+ D/deaf community and into the sectors that are adjacent to LGBT+ work"

- "I think we need to be saying: where is the money? Where is the funding? When you ask hearing organisations for funding, they often reply 'how will this benefit us?'. In order to develop the BSL language [to be inclusive] there is so much to be done. It is easy to talk and talk, we need money and funds to be able to create the safe spaces where these discussions can take place."



- *“There are LGBT+ people who don’t feel comfortable going to D/deaf organisations. Who knows why. Maybe they are not out? This needs to change.”*

You can find out more about LGBT Health and Wellbeing’s Helpline here: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/lgbt-helpline-scotland/>.

1. (e) What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan: Promotion of heritage and culture of BSL?

Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan.

Please tell us your reasons for your answer

We fully support the priority which seeks to promote the heritage and culture of BSL and would highlight the importance of resourcing specialised organisations that work with and for D/deaf and Deafblind people, community groups and those from marginalised communities to contribute to this work.

Our LGBT+ D/deaf community members have highlighted to us the significant lack of work in this area here in Scotland. LGBT+ D/deaf culture is (as our community tell us) its own subculture which should be recognised and celebrated. As mentioned previously in this response, our community members have highlighted the progress being made within the LGBT+ D/deaf community here in Scotland with regards to inclusivity and affirmation in BSL, yet highlight there is no recognition or resourcing of this work. One community member highlighted the need to get LGBT+ D/deaf people together when sharing: *“We have different [LGBT+ affirming] regional signs in Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales - we need to work together to expand our inclusive signs.”* another added *“we need the money and funds to be able to create the safe spaces where these discussions can take place, and where people who have busy lives can contribute and aren’t excluded.”*

We’d encourage the Scottish government to work with LGBT+ D/deaf people to ensure that LGBT+ D/deaf culture is present within the promotion of heritage and culture of BSL, and to resource LGBT+ community activists of lived experience who have long been doing this work and hold expert knowledge with regards to their community.



1. (f) What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan: Promotion of heritage and culture of BSL?

Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan.

Please tell us your reasons for your answer

We are in support of the key priority related to social care and wellbeing. As mentioned previously within this response, LGBT+ D/deaf community members who access our services (events, counselling, workshops etc.) do so currently via interpreters. It is critical to the wellbeing of LGBT+ D/deaf people that interpreters who are within LGBT+ spaces are LGBT+ affirming and knowledgeable of LGBT+ D/deaf culture.

Our LGBT+ D/deaf community members have shared with us their frustrations at the limited access offered by third sector organisations, including the inability to access specialised 1-1 support without an interpreter present. It's critical that there is resourcing of organisations who work with minority groups (and hold the cultural knowledge and experience) to improve BSL accessibility across both statutory and non-statutory services. This includes alleviating existing financial barriers for third sector organisations who wish to provide BSL training and upskilling for staff members, as well as tangible commitments towards the removal of barriers for the BSL community in employment across all sectors.

Dignity of choice is critical to our LGBT+ D/deaf community members, who have the same rights as hearing citizens to access wellbeing support services here in Scotland. We'd stress the importance of identifying and alleviating barriers which prevent D/deaf and deafblind people from accessing support services here in Scotland, and the need for commitment to improving access to support services in the third-sector (by working with and resourcing organisations) who work with minority communities to alleviate health inequalities and improve wellbeing.



Part 2 & 3: Actions within the BSL National Plan

3.1. Are there any additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan?

Yes.

The importance of recognising barriers experienced by D/deaf and Deafblind people who are multiply marginalised / members of multiple marginalised communities. It is important that we understand the specific experiences and needs of these communities (by consulting experts of lived experience) and subsequently improve/expand the provision which is in place to support them.

Part 4: Key changes for BSL users in Scotland

4.1. What is the one key change you would like to see happening for BSL users in Scotland by 2029?

We hope to see those from marginalised communities, such as LGBT+ D/deaf people, having access to provision and support which is fully affirming of their identity and understanding of their intersecting experiences.



Respondent Information Form

1. What is your name?

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2. What is your email address?

Rebecca@lgbthealth.org.uk

3. Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Individual

Organisation

4. What is your organisation?

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

5. The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

Publish response only (without name)

Do not publish response



lgbthealth.org.uk

Scotland's health and wellbeing charity for LGBTQ+ adults (16+)

We welcome the entire diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, including non-binary, queer, intersex, asexual people and all identities under the LGBTQIA+ community - this includes those questioning their sexuality or gender identity, or who do not use labels for either.

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