

British Sign Language (BSL) Toolkit for Practitioners

Section 1

This section covers:

1. Introduction

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'[Deaf] Children and young people who use British Sign Language (BSL) will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use British Sign Language 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 British Sign Language at school'.

[\(British Sign Language National Plan, 2017-2023, p12, School Education goals 16-24\)](#)

The Scottish Government aims to make Scotland the best place in the world for British Sign Language (BSL) users to live, learn, work and visit. In order to achieve this, the [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act](#) (2015) (available in BSL and English) came into force and the National Plan for 2017-2023 was published in 2017.

The 2015 Act requires public bodies in Scotland to publish their local British Sign Language plans every six years, showing how they will promote and support British Sign Language. (It is good practice for these to be published in BSL and English at the same time). Further information on local authority British Sign Language Plans can be found on [Parentzone Scotland](#) and the Scottish Government BSL [website](#).

The British Sign Language National Plan (2017-2023) sets out ten long-term goals for BSL in Scotland. It describes 70 actions Scottish Ministers will progress in order to achieve these long-term goals. These include:

- Working with partners to determine the best way of enabling families and carers to learn British Sign Language so that they can communicate effectively with their Deaf or Deafblind child in the crucial early years (0-8) (**Action 13**).
- Working with Education Scotland to share advice and examples of good practice for education professionals and support staff about how to engage effectively with parents who use British Sign Language (**Action 20**).
- Working with British Sign Language users to develop information and advice about how parents who use BSL can get further involved in their child's learning (**Action 21**).

Providing opportunities, supporting and building capacity amongst Scotland's parents to capitalise on the learning experiences of all children and young people is key to raising attainment. **Parents have an [important role to play](#) in supporting their child's learning and development at home as well as in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, schools and the wider community.**

Research evidence shows that when 'parents, carers and other family members are effectively involved in their children's education, the outcome for their children is better' (Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act [Guidance](#), 2006, pi).

This Toolkit is aimed at practitioners within early learning and childcare settings and schools who support all Deaf children, young people and their families, parents and carers who use British Sign Language and Tactile BSL, or who may consider using it, in education. It has been shaped by feedback from focus groups and interviews with Deaf and hearing parents, carers, Teachers of deaf children, Headteachers of Deaf schools/units, Deaf teachers, BSL Teachers and an online survey with parents who use British Sign Language. Consultation on the Toolkit has also been undertaken with Deaf professionals, a number of Education professionals, Scottish Government, The University of Edinburgh and the British Deaf Association Scotland.

Where reference is made to '**BSL users**', this means **Deaf and/or Deafblind people** (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) **whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language**. It should be noted that throughout this document the use of small 'd' refers to deaf children that have not yet acquired British Sign Language. The use of a capital 'D' specifically refers to Deaf or Deafblind people who use British Sign Language.