

British Sign Language (BSL) Toolkit for Practitioners

Section 6

This section covers:

6. Workforce development

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Staff in settings and schools can go through long periods of time where there is stability **but also significant times of fluctuation and turnover**. It is more common for people to change careers, occupational fields or jobs more regularly throughout their lifetime than in previous years. This can result in some staff being registered with a variety of professional bodies such as the [General Teaching Council of Scotland](#) (GTCS), [Scottish Social Services Council](#) (SSSC) or the [CLD Standards Council Scotland](#). Staff can also have a wide range of valuable background and life experience which can contribute towards engaging and working effectively with all parents and families.

Ensuring that the workforce is developed and equipped to work with British Sign Language users is an ongoing challenge. This is especially the case given that family circumstances along with methods of communication can change rapidly through social and economic influences and constantly emerging technology. Having a Teacher of Deaf children can help overcome these challenges. Additionally, all deaf pupils should have access to Deaf role models to support them to develop a strong sense of identity and pride in who they are. Education settings and schools could consider approaches whereby Deaf BSL signers can work with Deaf pupils in a Deaf role model capacity.

Given that British Sign Language is a language, it should not be assumed that practitioners and 'specialists' feel confident in using it when working with Deaf children and families who have Deaf BSL signing parents. Additionally, it should be noted that each Deaf child will require a tailored approach to meeting their needs.

Developing the workforce through appropriate qualifications and continuous professional development will continue to have positive outcomes for all children, parents, families and communities. As a setting or school, it is important to discuss which staff need to have fluency in BSL in order to work effectively with Deaf children. These could include:

- Teachers of Deaf children who can sign fluently, including Deaf BSL users
- Early learning and childcare staff working in resource-based schools and/or Deaf schools who can sign fluently
- Qualified and registered BSL/English Interpreters who have experience working with Deaf children and young people in mainstream settings and schools
- British Sign Language teachers for Deaf children

BSL SCQF 6 (or BSL Level 3) is a minimum qualification level for staff working with deaf children. Local authorities should ensure that staff are trained on an ongoing basis and aim for SCQF 10. This online [resource](#) will help teachers to reflect on their current BSL level and set out ways of working to improve their BSL levels and/or other language skills.



Having multilingual professionals in Deaf education is important and so the online resource above also looks at other community languages as well.

There are a range of networks that practitioners can access to gain specialist advice. Some of these include the Scottish Sensory Centre, the University of Edinburgh, Teacher of Deaf programme(s) and through the British Deaf Association Scotland.

Advanced BSL courses are available online throughout the UK. Practitioners should also consider attending a local Deaf centre(s) to learn local variants. While it should be noted that Education Scotland cannot endorse any particular course(s) run by private companies, it may be useful for practitioners to know that these do exist and that there is a cost attached.

Practitioners who choose to access any course should ensure that there is certification issued by the [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#), [iBSL](#)* or [Signature](#)* at the end of the course. Information about local Deaf clubs/centres can be accessed by contacting the British Deaf Association Scotland. *NB Education Scotland cannot endorse either of these courses which may incur a cost.

Practitioners who are learning BSL and who wish to practise their signing in an authentic immersive Deaf cultural space should approach this sensitively. For example, in exchange for intermediate BSL conversation practice, a practitioner could offer advice to a Deaf parent about how to work on a Maths project at home with their hearing child.

In every early learning and childcare setting and school, having at least one member of staff who has a minimum of Level 1 BSL and BSL awareness will be welcoming for British Sign Language users. It will enable them to have brief basic conversations with Deaf parents. More importantly, it would be good practice to have one setting or school within each local authority which has a BSL immersion environment with staff who are highly fluent in BSL.

Further information on a survey undertaken in 2016 to explore the current levels of British Sign Language held by Teachers of Deaf children is available [here](#).

Reflective Questions:

- Do practitioners undertake appropriate professional learning to be able to communicate with British Sign Language users in your setting or school?
- Are practitioners confident in communicating and working with British Sign Language users in your setting or school?
- Is there an opportunity to have a full-time one-year paid secondment for an early years officer or Teacher of Deaf children to work with signing Deaf children? This would allow an existing qualified teacher to improve their BSL levels significantly and return to their existing establishment after the secondment.
- Do practitioners have knowledge of information and resources about the Deaf community which is based locally?
- Do practitioners feel confident to support parents to signpost to appropriate Deaf centres, clubs or gatherings so that parents can engage and understand more about Deaf culture?
- Do practitioners feel confident in ensuring that support would be tailored to match the individual needs of Deaf and Deafblind BSL children and parents?