

# British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024 – 2030

# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires Scottish Higher Education Institutions to publish British Sign Language plans (in English and BSL) every six years, setting out how they will promote and support students who use BSL as their first, or preferred, language (including in its tactile form). Plans should convey a clear commitment that considers the needs of BSL users in the institution’s local context, meeting the priorities of BSL users 1. The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 was published by the Scottish Government in November 2023 and is available to view at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/bsl-national-plan-2023-2029/>

Our 2024-2030 BSL Action Plan has been informed by the guidance from the Scottish Government, reflection on the University’s Outcome Agreement and Equality Outcomes 2021-25, and consultation with BSL users.

### 1.2 Consultation

The University of Stirling is committed to protecting and supporting BSL. In preparation for producing an updated plan, we consulted BSL users through a number of consultation events, including a shared consultation event hosted by NHS Forth Valley at Falkirk Sensory Centre; a consultation event hosted by Stirling Council that included representatives from the BDA (British Deaf Association), Police Scotland and Active Stirling; and a delivery-focused event for further and higher education colleagues hosted by Edinburgh Napier University. All events included BSL users and members of local d/Deaf communities. The lessons learned through these consultation events have shaped our British Sign Language Plan.

### 1.3 Name and contact details of lead officer

* + - Justine Dashwood: Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, equality@stir.ac.uk

1 Wherever the plan refers to ‘BSL users’ this comprises d/Deaf and/or Deafblind people whose preferred language is British Sign Language.

# SECTION 2: PROGRESS AGAINST OUR 2018-2024 BSL PLAN – UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

Our previous plan identified four priority areas for action:

* Our Services
* Education
* Health, mental health, and wellbeing
* Culture and the Arts

### 2.1 Our Services

This section focused on improving the accessibility of our services, in line with the national plan goal that “Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users.”

**Progress:**

* Changes to the way we capture staff data on protected characteristics has led to the proportion of staff whose disability status was unknown decreasing by 9%, increasing our ability to identify our d/Deaf community and engage with BSL users.
* Accessibility of our digital platforms has improved, with all visual media displayed on the website and other digital media platforms now including captions.
* Specialist advice and guidance, including recommendations for BSL, is now provided on a one-to-one basis through our HR & Organisation and Student Services teams.

**Areas for further action:**

* While individual staff and students are supported on a one-to-one basis to access interpretation services, consultation indicates we could further promote the use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay services called ‘contactSCOTLAND-BSL’ to visitors **[Action 1.1]**
* Consultation highlighted the need to empower frontline support staff to engage with and support BSL users. As a result, prioritising BSL awareness training for this group will be a focus of our new plan. **[Action 2.4]**

### 2.2 Education

This section focused on the experience of BSL users in education and providing opportunities for learning BSL.

**Progress:**

* In 2023, the University’s Language Exchange Society was supported by Vice Chancellor Award funding to launch a programme of BSL classes. These are available to both staff and students.
* Our 2018-24 BSL Action plan was published online and available in BSL. The University of Stirling BSL Steering Group acted to monitor progress against the plan, reporting annually into the University’s Equality Steering Group.
* All visual media on prospective student-facing webpages was adapted to either use BSL or be captioned.
* Recruitment and Admissions staff were given awareness on using the Contact Scotland Service and information on this is included on our ‘Contact Us’ and ‘Accessibility and Inclusion’ webpages.
* Prospective students and anyone accompanying them can now access BSL interpreters at Open Days and Applicant Days as required.

**Areas for further action:**

* Following the successful pilot of BSL classes, the University aims to support and expand this programme **[Action 2.1]**

### 2.3 Health, Mental Health, and Wellbeing

This section focused on wellbeing support, in line with national plan goal that “BSL users should get the right help at the right time, expect recovery and fully enjoy their rights free from discrimination and stigma.”

**Progress:**

* The first joint University of Stirling and Stirling Students’ Union Mental Health Strategy was launched in 2021, including a commitment to identify and eradicate systemic barriers.
* The University's Gender Based Violence Strategy includes a specific commitment to ensure that ensure that information on GBV (Gender Based Violence) is readily accessible.

**Areas for further action:**

* Student surveys in 2023/4 indicated disabled students were less satisfied with the communication of mental health services, and records indicate that 54% of students requesting support relating to gender-based violence to date have disclosed a disability. BSL awareness and the needs of d/Deaf users will be included in actions to address this **[Action 3.2, 3.3]**

### 2.4 Culture and the Arts

This section focused on our contribution to the national goal that BSL Users would have “full access to the cultural life of Scotland, and an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts.”

**Progress:**

* The Macrobert Arts Centre now provides BSL awareness training, which Curators from the Art Collection have also completed.
* The Macrobert Arts Centre was nominated for a national award after securing funding from Creative Scotland to create a 12 month, BSL Director Trainee opportunity in 2019.
* The annual pantomime includes a BSL signed performance.
* Staff, students, and visitors were able to access a pilot BSL café project.
* A filter on the Macrobert Arts Centre website allows visitors to identify captioned screenings and accessible events.

**Areas for further action:**

* Consultation identified that there is no Deaf Club in Stirling. The University will offer support to expand the BSL café project pilot and identify further opportunities to consolidate BSL learning. **[Action 2.2, 2.3]**

# SECTION 3: BSL Plan 2024-2030 UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

By 2030, we will:

### 1. Continue to improve the accessibility of our digital platforms by:

1.1 Adding contactSCOTLAND-BSL information to the website footer (where we publish our telephone number) and to the bottom of all pages in the ‘Study’ section of the website where we currently advertise a telephone number.

1.2 Considering accessibility for d/Deaf users, including BSL users in the creation of a new digital campus map and wayfinder.

### 2 Expand access to BSL awareness and language learning by:

2.1 Supporting the continuation and expansion of the BSL language classes programme, launched in 2024 by the University’s Language Exchange Society.

2.2 Creating a skills practice group for people who have completed the BSL language classes programme to ensure new skills in BSL can be maintained.

2.3 Considering how to expand the Macrobert Arts Centre BSL cafe pilot.

2.4 Piloting BSL awareness training, including essential BSL language skills, with frontline support staff.

2.5 Considering opportunities to raise awareness of BSL as part of our work on inclusive curriculum.

### 3. Ensure our support for students is inclusive and accessible by:

3.1 Continuing to engage with the FE/HE British Sign Language Group to share and identify areas of good practice.

3.2 Ensuring that disability awareness training for Sexual Violence and Misconduct Liaison Officers (SVLMOs) includes awareness of BSL users and the d/Deaf community.

3.3 Ensure awareness of BSL users is included in development for staff in mental health support roles.

### 4. Monitoring and development

Recognising the need to embed inclusion into everyday practice, our 2024-2030 BSL Action Plan will be monitored as appropriate, reporting into the Equality Steering Group.

The BSL Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis, with a progress report supplied to the Equality Steering Group each year.