

Submission from Action on Hearing Loss Scotland

Action on Hearing Loss Scotland welcomes this opportunity to respond to your consultation on British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill.

Please find, attached, a transcription of a discussion about the Bill which we held at Forth Valley Sensory Centre on Wednesday 28 January and was attended by more than 20 members of the Falkirk Deaf Senior Citizens Club.

Action on Hearing Loss Scotland endorses the Scottish Council on Deafness's written evidence for the BSL (Scotland) Bill, although we wish the Committee to consider how, and how frequently, the implementations of the BSL National Plan and the listed authorities' BSL statements will be monitored. We also want to see BBC Scotland added to the list of public authorities covered by the Bill as we believe that major television broadcasts – especially leadership election debates and political party broadcasts – should have signed interpretation available.

As an organisation which employs British Sign Language users and runs a specialist service supporting people who use BSL in to education, training and employment, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland would like the opportunity to input to the Scottish Government's proposed BSL National Advisory Group.

Hilary Thirds presentation on the BSL Bill was shared with the group by Teri Devine – Action on Hearing Loss Scotland. This is a transcript of the question and answer session after.

Ian Carmichael: If the bill is passed, what happens next?

Teri: Once the bill is passed, the local authorities then have to come up with a plan. So the government come up with a national plan and the local authorities come up with their plan. So what we want at this point is for you to influence that and say what is the benefit to you that you would get from the BSL bill. And I'm told it'll be within 12 months... after it passes they have to come out with the plans

Right at this point in time we don't know what is in the plan and that's what part of this feedback is about, it's like what you think should be in there. This is your opportunity to say to the government actually this bill will really help me if you improved access to transport, you improved access to the GP, or you know the theatre, if you wanted to go to the theatre, things like that. The things that make your life better. So going to the bank, so what would you like to see in the plan?

Off camera: Everything, there's lots of stuff. Equality with hearing, community...

Crystal Prentice: She's asking what we want in the bill, my response is that there's that much stuff that we need in it, everybody is different, and everyone has their own different problems, so all that needs to go in to cover every opportunity that might happen within the bill

Teri: You have an individual opportunity to respond by video at the end of this meeting if you want to do that or there's a Facebook page that you can upload your own video onto from home, you can send it in by letter or you can send it in by email but your response has to be back by 12 o'clock on Monday 2nd February which is next Monday it's a really short time.

Crystal Prentice: I'm sure we all have access to facebook , some of us might not have but I know some of us have Facebook accounts and some don't, but those who do have, using facebook is a good way of passing on all this information for those who don't have, maybe don't want to email stuff to each other or maybe you don't want to come and be videoed and give your own experiences maybe that's the best way for myself personally, I don't have the confidence to use facebook I'd rather come here where I can get some help when needed and someone can film me and I can say what I want to say, I don't want to do it myself.

Manjeet Cross: I just want to add to what Crystal said, there's been a lot of uploads on facebook and a lot of links to doctors, GPs, also mental health has been a big issue. A lot of deaf people suffer from mental health issues and the problems that ariseand it could be made simple, it may be something simple like you want to go to the cinema, oh well we'll go see a film, and they only have opportunities like on a Monday or a Saturday afternoon. They don't have to be the big things it can just be anything that you think can improve, like some deaf people don't like being videoed which is fine, so I just have some suggestions to some things if you don't mind me saying, I hate cameras personally I don't like being videoed but I'll do it tonight and I'll get through it. I'll have to get the confidence from somewhere and do it but you can have the camera, or you can have another deaf person there maybe like a friend and you can talk to them and have the camera at the side so you don't feel like you're staring at a camera, or you can do it in private. So I just want to encourage people to use this to get more evidence. Some people are saying a lot of info about GPS. More information, more evidence we need to collate, then the more evidence we get the better it'll be, forget the bill.....

Catherine Carmichael: ... we've been in a private room before, a lot of deaf people are shy and don't want to get involved in that sort of... and we need to get this bill done and we had a meeting about 2 or 3 years ago, it was for a different reason but we had presentations and that.. we couldn't get people more involved... I'm not a member of Facebook but if you want to do it in private that's fine.

Teri: One of the things I want to say is on Facebook there's been a lot of really personal stories and peoples personal experience and really confidential stuff and that's not necessarily what we're looking for here, what we're looking for is the difference that the bill would make in your life, how it would make it better if you had access at the bank, if you go to the bank yourself. It's not necessarily about disclosing everything bad that's happened to you in the past; it's about the future and the changes that the bill will make in your life. So for example take education, if you

take further education; if you had a qualified interpreter with you while you were going through college and university what difference would that have made in your life? So that's the sort of feedback we're looking for.

Andy Irvine: you talk about 16 year olds, I'm concerned about their children, its important about their education we need under 16 as well family communication it's important for over 16 we mustn't forget the under 16s and encourage their language, their communication and be more successful in gaining employment in the future maybe we need to concentrate more on the under 16's, not the over 16's.

Teri: You've just to feed that back and you can feed back to the government saying this is what you want.

Andy Irvine: For example, a baby is born deaf. Where do we go? Go to the doctor and they say a hearing aid or cochlear implant, there's no mention about sign language and you feel stuck you just need the information, maybe books about all the information you need will make a lot of people more satisfied, a lot of people I work with don't realise I'm deaf, most like I'm supporting a parent making them more aware about their child with communication, try to encourage them get them more involved in games like playing with toys, not things that are based on music, a deaf child won't be able to hear that it's just making them more aware it's what they need.

Teri: You can give that feedback to the government saying that's what they need to consider

Rosalyn Hunter: Just two things; I've been on facebook and I've put two of my experiences up on facebook but I've just thought of another one and I'll be loading that one later on today. I like some of the comments and I feel a bit proud of what I've said and that it's going to make a difference. Like here, where will we be able to get comments from the responses because on facebook we get comments from the viewers and saying yeah it's a good point and that, but the uploads from here, will we get any comments on that? If the bill fails what happens then?

Derek Todd: Hello, my name is Derek Todd. I've not seen a lot of people here; I've met some of you before in... deaf club I've not seen some for such a long time. I work for Scottish council on deafness, SCOD. One thing I want to make clear, the BSL bill, or the BSL Scotland bill, it's not the bill it's not yet an act, just to clarify, don't copy this sign for the bill 'cause that's not the sign for the bill, It's not yet an act. It's not law yet. Some deaf were confused "is it law already?" It's not been passed; the bill is in process, make sure you're using the right signs. There's been some questions just linking to the education question, the first part of the bill is what we want to develop. We want to develop education, but it's educating the council, making them more aware, making sure what the BSL bill means, what it involves and what interpreters mean. A lot of councils, a lot of NHS, a lot of the public authorities, the police, fire, all don't understand what BSL means. They think access is just related to other disabilities but its communication and language as well, and deaf issues, it's about the language issue. The BSL Scotland bill is to plant the seed and for everything to grow and develop. Like a baby, how you see a baby grow and develop with educating them and letting them know what things mean, like training and putting things in place like a lot of councils have different languages and they

provide for Polish and Indian and languages like that, but BSL is recognised as a language but there's no act yet. It's important that that is settled first then everything is grown, we can take a seed off this tree and put it into education then educate other things like health then we can educate all the other authorities but with the BSL bill passed and becomes an act then you can go to the education act and ask them to make changes to the education act we can include BSL provision but we have to start with the BSL Scotland bill first, and that's why a lot of people say well it's okay we can go on and complain to the NHS for example but it's not enough we want you to give.. I see a lot of grandparents here tonight, grandparents of hearing children is that right? For example, your grandchildren, you pay for them to go to courses to learn sign language? Some do? Some deaf grandparents pay for their grandchildren to go and learn sign language, why is that? We should be able to communicate with our grandparents, proud to do that. A lot of children want to learn sign language, but they can't afford it. It's expensive to go and learn. We need you to give feedback like that. If the bill is passed what it would do for you? Like how would it improve your lifestyle, become a lady of leisure going shopping and things like that, and you could arrive places and people would be communicating with you or like on the bus for example, the bus driver might be able to say "where do you want to go?" Having that access makes your life and makes everybody's day go smoothly. Mental health issues may improve, your question what did you ask? If it fails what happens. If the BSL Scotland bill, Scottish government are supporting the bill with really positive support, some organisations are supporting the bill also, some of the questions we've been asked from Scottish parliament, education cultural committee they're responsible for consultation on the bill, it seems to be positive. But they need more information. Some people say "deaf and dumb" still, just "deaf" is enough. It's not that people aren't aware and they still refer to people as "deaf and dumb" so it's educating them, making them more deaf aware. If the bill isn't passed there are other things we can work on like the council will then need to look at improving the equality act. This is like a wakeup call for the council and for the government also, so it's important for you to give your own experiences to Scottish parliament. Try to encourage everybody, not just deaf people, hearing people, friends, family, and neighbours. Just think about it, you have a neighbour who's hearing, they're in the garden and you've never been able to talk to them but if they learned sign language you'd be able to talk to them and have good communication.

Marjorie Hunter: I'd like to ask Rosalyn about Facebook. I don't agree with Facebook, everybody is up to their own opinions. If I'm at my friend's house and they're on their Facebook looking at what's going on and they show me, I'm not interested. I don't want to be nosy. It's everybody's own choice whether they want to be on Facebook, I'm not.

Teri: There's various ways you can feed back. Everybody's different, some people are comfortable putting their stories on Facebook and that's up to the individual. You're not comfortable you can send it privately by email or send a letter in, or we can do the video for you if you want and upload it privately so nobody else sees it, but that's your decision and that's your prerogative. You can do that. There's an opportunity on Facebook to upload the video privately, that other people can't see it as well but other people like to share their experience.

Mhairi Thom: I would just like to say that I agree with Derek about people learning sign language. My daughter is learning sign language just now, she's done level 1, level 2, level 3, level 6 and she's had to pay for that throughout. It's very difficult for young people now to learn sign language, and to become interpreters and I feel if BSL was taught in schools we would have more interpreters on the go, more people would have an understanding and there would be more interpreters available rather than the 80 we have just now. And also if there could be a university class going on like you can get engineers and all different other courses but it would be helpful if they had a BSL one.

Teri: Heriot Watt University have a BSL Course

Mhairi Thom: They've got to pay for it though; they've still got to pay for it.

Teri: Having previously worked for the SQA, I can tell you that if the bill is passed it will be put on the same playing field as Gaelic and it means they can develop a qualification for schools and students can then choose to do BSL if that's the case. The bills got to be passed first; it's got to be recognised in law before the SQA can do that.

Mhairi Thom: It would maybe solve in the future the shortage of interpreters.

Teri: So is there any more feedback? Are there any more questions? Derek?

Derek Todd: The other thing with the bill if it's passed is maybe in the future maybe more employment opportunities for deaf people to become involved. We don't have enough trainers in Scotland, we don't have enough interpreters in Scotland so if education was added in the bill we don't have enough teachers, we don't have enough for the education so it's important for us to develop to train people like if they want to become teachers and trainers to teach sign language and grow that pool of trainers then we'll become part of a curriculum. It's important like employment opportunities and at college and university but we need to raise the awareness of interpreters and what they actually do, what does an interpreter do? Do they need to pay to go on the course? So a lot of deaf struggle because of this. The ratio is 1 interpreter for 200 deaf. In Norway I think it's 1 interpreter for 50 deaf, in Scotland it's 1 interpreter to 200 deaf, so everybody is fighting "that's my interpreter, that's my interpreter" and that shows there's not enough interpreters so it's important to grow that pool. So it's important that you support your deaf friends and future generations, we want their lives to be better. Your experiences and how to solve problems, they can see the problems and how problems are solved and that can be passed onto other generations. I'd have more interpreters if I could solve the problem, people would be more trained, more awareness, deaf awareness and awareness of sign language. I know the lady said about Facebook being nosy, but I never expected the stories to come up, some of them very emotional. Some are very confident and get a lot of good comments and have been very open in talking about their experiences and that's made me feel proud. They've become aware that they're not the only one suffering the same, there are people out there who are going through the same problem and they thought they might have been the only one when they're feeling stressed and have family issues, like wanting to communicate with their hearing family like maybe visiting your aunt, your uncle or your cousin, but how do you

communicate? Like if they learned BSL we could go to even other countries, rather than just having spoken language and relying on that.

Crystal Prentice: To be honest with everybody, I'm standing here now I'm nervous as anything I'm not a very confident person, I'm very nervous. I don't know what problems you have and I don't know who has Facebook. Some people object to Facebook and some like using Facebook, each to their own you want to be a member of Facebook or not it's everybody's own choice but in the past I used to look on Facebook and one person would start something like their experience with mental health, their depression and one person would start talking about their experiences and it starts the ball rolling everybody else feels like oh yeah they've got the same problems and got through the same issues as I do so it starts everything rolling, everybody has their own problems but realise that deaf people do have mental health issues, and there's a lot of people who do suffer with this and they can feel a lot better that they're not the only one. There are other people there and you can encourage and support each other and help each other going through any difficulty they have, like if you have depression not to worry, there are people you can get support from and that's really helpful, that's why for me Facebook is great as everyone has a chance to share their one experiences.

Ian Carmichael: How long will this process take? Will it take 1 or 2 years before the bill is actually finally passed?

Derek Todd: from Scottish governments view if there are no problems it will maybe passed this Christmas 2015, or January 2016. They are confident that it will be passed by then. Hopefully it will be done before the next parliamentary election in May 2016.

Teri: So if you remember what I was saying earlier, once the bill has passed the government has then got a year to develop the national plan so if it passes at Christmas, possibly by December 2016 there will be a national plan around BSL.

Additional email from Marjorie Hunter 30 Jan 15:

Dear Teri, hope you keeps well. I was at sensory centre at falkirk last Wednesday. I would like to say that I miss one thing to say that I know about votes on 7th may, labour,Tory,liberal, ukip and others parties will be on tv broadcast for 5 or 10 mins, I would like interpreter will be on TV, makes deaf people will understand interpreter sing languages. I hope you understand what I mean it . Ok Regards Mrs hunter Sent from my iPad

Mrs Hunter is asking for party political broadcasts to be made accessible through BSL Interpreters.