Consultation on the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill

Respondent Information

Question 1 - Do you think we need to change the law to promote the use of BSL and, if so, why?

Responses -
- Yes we need to change the law.
- BSL is the first language of a large section of the Scottish population. Unlike people who use an alternative spoken language, like French, German etc, deaf people cannot learn to hear or speak English. BSL also has a different grammatical structure to English which makes it difficult for people who use BSL to communicate in written English.
- BSL should have the same status as French, German etc to study as part of the national curriculum.
- Teaching deaf and hearing children BSL will ensure future generations do not face the communication barriers deaf people experience at present. This will enable people who use BSL to become fully included in all aspects of society.

Question 2 - How realistic do you think this aim is and to what extent do you believe the Bill can achieve this objective?

Responses -
- By making it Law that agencies have to say how they will promote the use of BSL and then be held accountable for how well they have achieved this will help make the aim of the Bill more achievable.
- Agencies being required to improve the awareness of staff within each agency in relation to BSL will ensure appropriate communication support is provided.
- Ideally we would want to see all staff having the ability to communicate using BSL even at a basic level.
- Providing BSL training could be a good opportunity to create employment for some people who use BSL.

Question 3 - The Bill is solely about the use of BSL. Could there be unintended consequences for other languages or forms of communication used by the deaf community?

Responses -
- BSL is a unique language with its own grammatical structure which is different to English. This can make it difficult for deaf people to communicate even through the use of written English.
• Within schools at present many deaf children are taught to use Sign Supported English. This is important as it helps improve young people’s understanding of the English language.

• However BSL is still the first language for the majority of deaf people. It is therefore important the both Sign Supported English and BSL are taught to ensure deaf people are able to communicate in a variety of situations. This will help many deaf people feel less isolated and excluded.

**Question 4 - The Scottish Government will also be required to designate a Minister with lead responsibility for BSL (Section 2). What should this Minister do?**

Responses -
• They must consult with people who use BSL before any decisions are made that may affect them.

• They must make sure that the Scottish Government is aware of issues affecting people who use BSL.

• They must make sure that information published by the government is in formats suitable to people who use BSL. This is particularly important in relation to information produced at local and national elections to ensure deaf people are able to vote in a more informed way.

**Question 5 - If listed authorities say they will do something relating to the promotion of BSL, will the Performance Review process ensure they are held to account?**

Responses -
• It will only work if people who use BSL are consulted on how well agencies are achieving the actions they have agreed to implement in each Authority report.

• Not enough just to get progress report from the agency.

• Also important that people who use BSL are given access to review plans, in BSL format, once they are published.

**Question 6 - Do you have any comments on the proposed content of the Plans?**

Responses -
• Requiring agencies to outline how they will promote BSL is sufficient content for the plans.

• It will however be important that agencies are held accountable for how well they have achieved their proposed outcomes.

**Question 7 - Do you have any comments on these proposed timescales?**

Responses -
• The time scales are too long. It could be two years before the first Authority plans are produced.
• In subsequent parliamentary terms Authority plans will be produced within the first year of the parliament but not reviewed until six months before the end of the term. This could mean that there may not be sufficient time within the length of the parliament to address poorly performing agencies.

• Plans should be reviewed after twelve months.

**Question 8 - What effect do you think these requirements will have on you or your organisation?**

Responses -  
• This should not be a concern for deaf people.

• Agencies who work with people who use BSL should be consulted to make sure any barriers to implementing the bill are identified and addressed before it becomes law.

• Agencies finding it difficult to say how they will promote BSL should not stop the bill becoming law.

• We have been having discussion on how to improve awareness of BSL for 50 years. We need to see some action this time.

**Question 9 - Would you suggest any changes to the list of public authorities?**

Responses -  
• It should not just be hearing organisations who are required to produce plans.

• Agencies such as Scottish Association for Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) and British Deaf Association (BDA) who work directly with people who use BSL should also be expected to produce plans on how they will promote the use of BSL.

This response was completed in partnership with service users.