

**STUC Written Evidence
Education and Culture Committee
British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill**

Introduction

The STUC is Scotland's trade union centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the trade union movement in Scotland; reflecting the aspirations of trade unionists as workers and citizens.

The STUC represents over 617,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy and our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, Black/minority ethnic members, LGBT members, and members with a disability, as well as, retired and unemployed workers.

Through our network of Union Learning Representatives and Scottish Union Learning the STUC has been involved in promoting BSL for a number of years delivering through taster sessions and more formal learning such as Introduction to BSL for Frontline Staff, Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2.

Over 900 learners have participated in these courses involving members from trade unions with members in the public and private sectors including UCATT, Community, POA Scotland, TSSA, RMT, UNISON, USDAW, GMB and FBU. This learning has been delivered throughout Scotland and demonstrates a commitment from the trade union movement and our members to help promote BSL as a first language of the Deaf community but also to help them access public services and lead more inclusive lives.

The STUC welcomes the opportunity to submit this evidence and would like to respond to the following questions;

Question1

The STUC would agree that legislation is required to ensure consistency across all public authorities placed within the scope of this legislation. We would doubt if a voluntary code could be applied with any degree of success across the 117 authorities listed and we believe this could lead to a lottery where Deaf people can access services though BSL only if the authority they are dealing with has signed up to the voluntary code. This would undermine the intended purpose of the Bill that is to promote BSL throughout Scotland and this can only be done by placing legal duties on public authorities to do so. We would also question how the purposes of the Bill could be met by amending legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 or any other piece of reserved legislation as we would doubt that in the current deregulatory climate this would be achievable. In addition many Deaf people do not see themselves as or wish to declare themselves as disabled and we would question why someone whose first and only language is BSL should have to in order to access services. We would share the view of the Scottish Council for Deafness that while this is the case there is no equality only continuing discrimination.

Question 2

We would sincerely hope that the Bill meets its objective and lead to increased use of BSL in delivering public services. From our experience there is interest within trade union membership to undertake BSL training at various levels and we would hope that public authorities, where trade unions traditionally have higher membership, acknowledge the resource they have within their existing workforce and look at how they can provide and fund BSL training through their recognised trade union and existing Scottish Union Learning structures.

Question 4

The role of the Minister with lead responsibility for BSL should be to promote its use in Scotland, not just in Scottish public authorities but also in private sector organisations providing services to the public. Demand for BSL union provided BSL training is spread across public and private sector workplaces and the STUC appreciates that, while the Scottish Government can promote increased use of workplaces in all public service workplaces, the reserved nature of employment and equality legislation limits its role within private sector workplaces to that function only.

Within the public authorities listed the responsible Minister should be tasked with ensuring that authorities comply with their BSL plan and hold to account those who fail to do so.

Question 17

The STUC believes that the Financial Memorandum may well accurately reflect costs associated with the Bill as far as developing and publishing BSL plans and, in the case of the Scottish Government, carrying out performance reviews little information is given regarding implementation costs in delivering increased access to BSL. The STUC believes that workplace learning has proved to be an effective delivery method for BSL training and we would hope that any funding would be made available for public authorities to meet their obligations under BSL plans would reflect the work already carried out by trade unions in promoting the language and allow our affiliates to increase their capacity in delivering BSL training.