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11 April 2022

Dear Mr Kerr, Convener of Education, Children and Young People Committee,

Thank you for your letter of 31 March 2022 addressed to Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, regarding the BSL Bill LCM and the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for this matter.

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 (“the Act”) has been in force since October 2015. A significant part of the Act is delivered through the British Sign Language National Plan 2017 – 2023 with 70 actions across ten long-term ambitions. A new National Plan will be published and implemented following the conclusion of the current plan at the end of 2023, in line with section 1(6) of the Act.

The Scottish Government published the [British Sign Language \(BSL\) Progress Report](#) on 27 October 2021, as an update on the implementation of the 2017-2023 BSL National Plan. It shows progress on a range of fronts, including education, BSL/English interpreting, and public life. The report outlines how Scottish Government has funded BSL Partnership organisations to engage with and support public bodies in developing their BSL plans, and notes important developments such as the decision that Scotland’s 2022 census includes the question ‘can you use BSL?’ for the first time. We are providing £1.1 million in funding, through the Equality and Human Rights Fund, to third sector organisations to continue to support public bodies with implementing their BSL plans across Scotland.

We do not consider that any change would be required to Scottish Ministers’ work under the Act as a result of the UK Government’s BSL Bill being enacted. The BSL Bill does not place any duties on the Scottish Ministers.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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The reporting duty in clause 2 of the BSL Bill only relates to action taken by relevant UK Government departments. The National Plan only relates to measures that are within devolved competence.

However, Scottish Ministers may wish to take guidance issued by the Secretary of State under clause 3 of the BSL Bill into account when developing their next National Plan.

I hope this reply is helpful.

CLARE HAUGHEY

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