

## **1. Introduction**

NDCS welcomes the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill and the provision for supporting BSL as a language and its increased use in the delivery of public services. This Bill is important legislation in securing the place of BSL as a recognised language in our society.

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity in Scotland dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. In Scotland, we have a dedicated team based in Glasgow and led by Heather Gray, Director. The team has a strong focus on addressing the attainment gap that exists for deaf learners. This includes the work we do with our Young Campaigners who are a group of deaf young people aged 14-20 years old. They call for better services and campaign on issues affecting deaf children in Scotland.

Further information on NDCS can be found in our evidence submission to the Committee dated 2 February 2015.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Summary of NDCS' position on the Bill**

The aim of the Bill is to promote and raise awareness of BSL. It will mean that national and local government will need to establish Plans that set out how they intend to promote the use of the language. NDCS welcomes the principles of the Bill.

As it stands, the Bill does not provide specific duties around education however it is intended as an enabling framework. It will be down to national and local government to develop Plans and outline the specific actions they will take to promote the use of BSL in schools.<sup>2</sup>

We would like these plans to address a number of important issues for deaf learners:

- Closing the persisting **education attainment gap** for deaf learners;
- Ensuring that children and young people who access teaching and learning through BSL are supported by Communication Support Workers (CSWs) who are able to accurately interpret what the teacher is saying. This requires **minimum levels of qualification in BSL**.
- **BSL becoming an accredited school qualification** within the full Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and having the same status as other languages;
- Improving the availability of **Family Sign Language (FSL)** which enhances the ability of hearing parents to communicate with their deaf child and promote their development. NDCS Scotland currently delivers FSL courses and understands the lasting impact this kind of support can have on children and families;

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<sup>1</sup> [NDCS evidence submission](#) 2 February 2015

<sup>2</sup> Like that of the [Scottish Government Early Years framework and Collaborative](#)

It is critical that the aspirations of the Bill are **appropriately resourced** so they can be fully realised. For example, the delivery of FSL is not routinely funded and will require national and local investment in order to address this gap in BSL service delivery.

### **3. Context**

#### *National data*

There is currently no complete national data set on numbers of deaf children and young people in Scotland. The latest Consortium for Research into Deaf Education 2014 Scotland Report (CRIDE 2014) data suggests there are 3,057 deaf children in Scotland. The latest data on preferred communication methods of deaf children in Scotland (CRIDE 2013) suggests 3% of deaf children solely use British Sign Language (BSL), around 12% use sign language in combination with another language and 0.6% use a sign system other than BSL.<sup>3</sup> Without a basic understanding of the numbers of deaf children and their needs, it is difficult for national and local government to effectively plan service delivery.

### **4. The importance of early years**

Deafness in childhood has a major impact on the learning of spoken language. With 90% of deaf children being born to hearing parents or carers, it is crucial then that families receive timely early interventions of support and information, as highlighted in the Scottish Government's See Hear sensory impairment strategy.

#### *Family Sign Language*

Those parents or carers who wish to use BSL to communicate with their deaf child currently have little support available to meet their needs. There is currently no nationally funded provision for these parents to access appropriate training or classes in order to communicate with their child through sign language. Traditional BSL classes are more appropriate for adult life and interactions while family provision needs to include signs and phrases to facilitate play and child-centred activities.

NDCS' Early Years project, *Your Child Your Choices*, delivers FSL to families with deaf children in the Early Years. It is the only curriculum in the UK of its kind and is unique in that the BSL is taught in a child-centred way using vocabulary suitable for a young child. According to its independent evaluation report, the delivery of FSL course contributes strongly to deaf children having improved vocabulary and positive family relationships as a result of their parents having better communication skills.<sup>4</sup>

In its 2011 election manifesto, the SNP stated that it would "take forward plans to support the provision of British Sign Language lessons to parents of new-born deaf children." NDCS would urge the Scottish Government to deliver on this promise.

### **5. Education experiences of deaf learners**

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<sup>3</sup> Consortium for Research into Deaf Education 2013 Scotland Report

<sup>4</sup> For more information on FSL see [NDCS evidence submission](#) dated 2 February 2015

The Communication preferences of deaf learners vary. Latest data suggests over 80% mainly use spoken English and around 15% mainly use British Sign Language, Spoken English with sign language or another sign language.

Deaf learners' limited access to incidental learning, that would enable them to acquire and absorb new language and information, means that it is likely that they will require additional support to ensure they are able to make the same progress as other children of a similar age and cognitive ability.

### *Academic attainment*

Scottish Government data shows that there is a significant attainment gap for hearing impaired school leavers, and the attainment of this group is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland.

In the 2012/13 year, the average tariff score of deaf school leavers was 289, while the average score for leavers with no additional support needs was 439. In the same year, almost 10% of deaf school leavers left with no school qualifications compared with 2% of all pupils.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past 3 years the average tariff score for deaf learners has improved, which is positive. However it is important to note that on a number of indicators such as numbers leaving school with no qualifications, and those qualifying to enter Higher Education, this group had a worsening attainment profile in 2012/13. NDCS has welcomed the formal acknowledgement of this gap by the Scottish Government and their commitment to closing it.<sup>6</sup>

### *Qualifications of CSWs*

The role of CSWs is critical to ensuring that children and young people who rely on signing to access teaching and learning receive accurate interpretation of what the teacher is saying and what is going on in class.<sup>7</sup> Ensuring CSWs in schools and colleges have a minimum level of BSL qualification so that they can effectively fulfil this role is fundamental. *"They should have a higher level [of BSL]. For science and things there is a lot of jargon so they need to understand that."*<sup>8</sup>

Deaf young people who use BSL as their preferred method of communication require high quality of fluency of support which, given the lack of qualification framework for support staff, is not always on hand. It can be frustrating for learners to not feel confident that everything the teacher is saying is being effectively translated to them and they understand everything that is going on in the classroom, *"sometimes the teachers have limited signing skills and I don't understand."*<sup>9</sup>

NDCS believes the Bill is an opportunity to strengthen the consistency of qualifications for those working with deaf learners across Scotland, and address issues such as minimum qualifications for Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs) and CSWs, as well as the regulatory framework they work within.

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<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government, 2014, [Attainment and Leaver Destinations Supplementary Data](#)

<sup>6</sup> See NDCS [Close the Gap](#) report

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the role of CSWs see [NDCS evidence submission](#) 2 February 2015

<sup>8</sup> Quote from young person at NDCS & Education Scotland's Deaf Learners Conference 2015

<sup>9</sup> Quote from young person at NDCS & Education Scotland's Deaf Learners Conference 2015

## *BSL within the modern language curriculum*

All children, including those who are deaf, should have the option to develop BSL skills. Currently, a very small number of children have the opportunity to study BSL at school, and none have the opportunity to develop their BSL skills right through secondary school due to lack of qualifying routes in senior years through SQA.

Simple solutions such as pupils who use BSL as their first/preferred language accessing funding to enable them to teach hearing pupils and staff to learn BSL are ways to help facilitate social inclusion and participation. This would also increase opportunities for other deaf young people to develop their BSL skills.

NDCS recommends that BSL becomes an accredited school qualification within the full Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and has the same status as other languages. We believe the Bill has the ability to provide the necessary framework to improve these opportunities to learn BSL in schools and the routes through which pupils can gain qualifications in BSL. The 1 + 2 language initiative to promote the learning of languages in primary school provides a clear model through which BSL could be included. Developing these opportunities would have the benefit of strengthening and enriching the inclusive education experiences of all children and young people.

### **6. Resourcing the Bill**

The position of authorities to respond to demand for services in BSL will depend on a number of contributing factors. Particularly the funding available to resource these services. Authorities will need to deliver on their plans and will need to invest into BSL provision in order to do so. In a time of tight budgetary pressures, authorities will be faced with difficult decisions about taking resources from one area to invest in another. There are also current workforce constraints in Scotland of those qualified to deliver services in BSL with only 80 interpreters in the country. As such there is concern surrounding the impact that this may have on implementing the aspirations of the Bill.

NDCS proposes that guidance is developed to accompany the Bill which addresses this issue and suggests ways in which listed authorities can efficiently and creatively meet their new duties. NDCS proposes that more investment from the Scottish Government is required to enhance BSL provision for deaf children and young people. This investment should support authorities to implement their plans and create real change and improvement in outcomes for this group.

It is also vital that appropriate resources are put in place to ensure the improvement of outcomes and to close the educational attainment gap for deaf learners in Scotland. NDCS recommends that in developing its National Plan the Scottish Government will consider and fund some of the very positive developments that the Department for Education is funding in England through the I-Sign project.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on I-Sign see [NDCS evidence submission](#) 2 February 2015