

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1777](#)

Main Petitioner: Scott Macmillan

Subject: British Sign Language (BSL) and the Curriculum for Excellence

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce British Sign Language (BSL) into the Curriculum for Excellence.

Background

The petitioner is calling for British Sign Language (“BSL”) to be introduced into the Curriculum for Excellence (“CfE”). In the background documents provided with the petition, the petitioner appears to be arguing that schools ought to teach BSL.

Languages

While local authorities have a statutory duty to secure an adequate and efficient education for children of school-age in their area, what this education should entail is not set out in legislation. In fact, very little of the school curriculum is statutory.

CfE provides a framework for a coherent curriculum for children aged 3 to 18. One of the foundation documents of CfE, [Building the Curriculum 3](#) states that children and young people are entitled to expect a broad general education (“BGE”) from aged three to the end of S3, followed by three years of senior phase where they have the opportunity to gain qualifications.

BGE is organised through curriculum areas and under each area are a number of experiences and outcomes (“Es&Os”) and associated benchmarks. Es&Os are statements about children's learning and progression in each curriculum area; benchmarks are intended to provide clarity on when national standards in each area are met. Experiences and Outcomes were drafted to be inclusive to users of BSL.

One area of the curriculum is ‘Languages’, which covers English, literacy and Gàidhlig, Gaelic (Learners), modern languages and classical languages. For hearing pupils, BSL would be a second or additional language. The Es&Os for modern languages do not specify which additional languages should be taught.

The Scottish Government's has a 1+2 policy for learning languages. The Government's aim is for every child to have the opportunity to learn a second language from P1-S3 and a further modern language from P5-S3. [Education Scotland states that](#) "The policy should be fully implemented across the country by August 2021".

During senior phase, most young people in Scotland will take qualifications designed and developed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority ("SQA"). Schools will generally require pupils in S4 to attempt a qualification in literacy, mathematics/numeracy and a science. Beyond that, young people are largely able to choose which qualifications they wish to take. The SQA offers a number of qualifications on BSL.

BSL Act and plans

The [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) provides for a duty on the Scottish Government to "promote, and facilitate the promotion of, the use and understanding of" BSL. Ministers must also publish a National Plan, the first of which was [published in October 2017](#).

Listed authorities must also produce BSL plans which set out what they will be doing in relation to the use of BSL. The authority plans must also try to be consistent with the National Plan. Local authorities are listed authorities for the purposes of the 2015 Act.

The National Plan included the following long-term goal:

"Children and young people who use BSL will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child's education; and more pupils will be able to learn BSL at school."

Under this goal were listed nine actions to be completed by 2020. One of the actions was to "Instruct Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT) to lead a programme of work to support BSL learning for hearing pupils."

Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government Actions

As noted above, the Parliament passed the [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Bill](#) (now an Act) in 2015 in the last session and the Scottish Government has since published its National BSL plan.

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18 December 2019

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