

## **PE1777/C**

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 9 November 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to respond again to the aforementioned petition, following further consideration at the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 1 October 2020. The Committee has asked the Scottish Government if it will consider designating British Sign Language as a L2, rather than L3, additional language under its 1+2 approach.

Under the 1+2 approach, and in keeping with the flexibility of Curriculum for Excellence, schools and local authorities are empowered to decide which languages to offer to pupils, depending on their local circumstances and the needs of their learners and communities. As the Scottish Government is unable to intervene and set requirements about the choices that schools make in this respect, we cannot require BSL to be taught as a first additional language (L2) rather than a second (L3) in schools.

It should be noted that Education Scotland advises that the L2 “must be a language which children can continue to study at secondary school to the level of a National Qualification”<sup>1</sup>. There are currently only eight languages that meet this criteria: French, Spanish, German, Italian, Gaelic (for learners), Urdu, Mandarin and Cantonese. There are no National Qualifications in place that would allow BSL to be taught in the same way as these languages, so pupils would not be able to validate their learning to the same level if it were to be provided as an L2 by schools.

The introduction of new qualifications is a matter for the SQA. In order to establish a new National Qualification, they would first need to consider a number of factors. This can include a minimum number of learners, evidence of demand, and sufficient availability of GTCS-registered teachers of the subject, among others. The SQA would also need to consider the costs and resources required in order to develop the necessary framework of progression, as well as the qualifications themselves.

We can report though that the SQA does offer a range of qualifications in BSL from SCQF level 3 to SCQF level 8<sup>2</sup>. These have been designed for both hearing and deaf learners to develop their language skills, which can benefit learners of BSL as an L3 in improving their language fluency and understanding of the Sign Language Community.

We can also report that a number of local authorities are carrying out pilots to upskill teachers in BSL, and that Queen Margaret University now includes BSL as a core part of its Initial Teacher Education programme. These and other endeavours represent positive steps in training the future school workforce to support the delivery and use of BSL for both deaf and hearing pupils.

Our 2019 survey of local authorities on implementation of the 1+2 approach has shown that good progress is being made in the uptake of BSL. Schools across 10 local

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance on L3 within the 1+2 policy <https://education.gov.scot/media/1cugpk4v/modlang12-l3-guidance-may19.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> British Sign Language (BSL) qualifications <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/75384.html>

authorities reported that they delivered BSL as an L3, which represents a doubling of local authorities from the previous year. We are confident that further growth will be reported by the next survey, and we are optimistic that the growth of BSL through the 1+2 approach will create an appetite for further learning of BSL by hearing pupils.

**JOHN SWINNEY**