**University of Aberdeen**

**British Sign Language Action Plan 2024-2030**

The University of Aberdeen is delighted to present its second British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan 2024-2030 which represents, in line with Aberdeen 2040, our ongoing commitment to securing the highest standards of equality, diversity and inclusion and to creating inclusive campuses where accessibility is embedded across all our functions.

The University has continued to implement its ambitious British Sign Language Plan (BSL) 2018 - 2024. Progress has been made to create inclusive and welcoming environments for BSL users such as BSL interpreters being present at graduations, Open Days and Offer Holder Days; Deaf Awareness training and BSL Taster sessions have been offered to staff across the University; the Disability Team have provided support with the provision of quality-assured captions, transcriptions for lectures, note-takers, interpreters; and guidance for applying for Disabled Students Allowance has been developed. Additionally, the University has established connections with other further and higher education institutions in Aberdeen and across Scotland to share best practice and identify opportunities. The University continues to maintain its relationship with North East Sensory Services (NESS).

The University BSL Action Plan 2024-2030 follows the Scottish Government’s [British Sign Language (BSL): national plan 2023 to 2029](https://www.gov.scot/publications/bsl-national-plan-2023-2029/pages/2/) and includes actions under eight of the ten priority areas detailed in the National Plan. These eight priority areas have been selected as they are applicable to Higher Education settings.

Internal and external stakeholders have been consulted to understand what barriers BSL users face when working or studying in Further and Higher Education. The consultation was carried out through a survey which was published in English and through a video in BSL on the [British Sign Language Consultation webpage](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/british-sign-language-plan-2024-2030-consultation-17434.php) and the results have been reviewed.

**Summary of the University BSL Action Plan 2024-2030**

The University BSL Action Plan 2024-2030 includes a mix of short-, mid- and long-term actions under the eight priority areas listed below. Actions will be delivered in the next six years.

1. **Delivering the BSL Action Plan 2024-2030**

Our long-term goal is to embed BSL in relevant University policies and processes to overcome the barriers faced by BSL users when they work or study with us. We will:

* annually review the Terms of Reference of the BSL Working Group to ensure its remit remains fit for purpose.
* annually review this Action Plan to ensure it is relevant to the need of our BSL community.
* publish a progress report at the midway point on the University’s [British Sign Language Plan webpage](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/british-sign-language-13353.php).
* work with listed authorities to share best practice and knowledge.
* consult with BSL users to enhance communication.

1. **BSL accessibility**

Our long-term goal is to ensure information is accessible to BSL users by increasing people’s awareness of communication tools and technology. We will:

* improve the accessibility of the University’s website and increase awareness of the Digital Accessibility Toolkit and related training.
* continue to promote, via Staff and Student Newsletters, the use of Contact Scotland BSL, Scotland’s BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service.
* promote, once launched, the use of SignPort for BSL/English interpreter bookings.
* increase BSL knowledge through the introduction of a basic BSL course (after gathering expressions of interests).

1. **Access to employment**

Our long-term goal is to support BSL users to develop the necessary skills that will enable them to enter and progress in their chosen career. We will:

* develop opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, helping them understand the support available to them and develop their skills.
* identify solutions to specific barriers for BSL users accessing employability support.

1. **Health and Wellbeing**

Our long-term goal is to ensure BSL users will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make informed choices at every stage of their lives. We will:

* ensure mental health information and services are accessible to all individuals, including those who use BSL.
* deliver BSL training to staff and students involved in mental health and wellbeing roles.

1. **Celebrating BSL culture**

Our long-term goal is to ensure that BLS users have full access to cultural life of the University, and equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to culture and arts and share BSL/deaf culture with the University community. We will:

* enable BSL users to take part in culture and arts as participants and audience members.
* collaborate with BSL organisations to celebrate BSL culture and heritage
* increase deaf awareness among staff and students.

1. **BSL data**

Our long-term goal is to strengthen the data on the BSL community in Scotland to better inform decision making and service design. We will:

* encourage existing and prospective staff and students to disclose if they are BSL users.
* examine existing data and intelligence from third parties to learn what principles can be applied to advance equality in service design.

1. **Transport**

Our long-term goal is to ensure BSL users have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support transport use in Aberdeen. We will:

* work with local transport providers to make public travel more accessible for BSL users.

1. **Democratic Participation**

Our long-term goal is to ensure BSL users are fully involved in democratic processes at the University of Aberdeen. We will:

* facilitate BSL support in electoral campaigns and the election process to ensure BSL users can make informed decisions with access to all relevant information.

**Implementation of the Action Plan 2024-2030**

The BSL Plan Working Group will be responsible to ensure this Action Plan is implemented in the next six years. The Group will report biannually to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

**How to get involved**

This BSL Action Plan is an evolving document which can be modified and improved through engagement and consultation. Feedback on this Plan is welcomed and can be shared by contacting the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team via [edi@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:edi@abdn.ac.uk). Alternative formats of the BSL Plan can be sought by contacting the EDI team. BSL users can contact the EDI team through [Contact Scotland BSL](https://contactscotland-bsl.org/).

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| **Priority 1:** Implementing the BSL Plan 2024 – 2030  **Our long–term goal:** Embedding BSL in relevant University of Aberdeen policies and processes to overcome the barriers faced by BSL users when they work or study with us. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | **Action** | | | | **Milestone** | | | **Timeline** | | | **Success Measure** |
|  | Annually review the Terms of Reference of the British Sign Language Plan Working Group to ensure its remit and membership remain fit for purpose. | | | | New members are sought via Staff and Student Newsletters as well as the Staff Disability Network Group and the Disabled Students Forum. | | | Annually (January) | | | The Group has a wide representation of staff and students from across the University, including senior leaders and BSL users. |
|  | Annually review the University BSL Plan 2024 – 2030 to ensure it is flexible and relevant to the needs of our BSL community. | | | | 1.2a Twice a year review the completion rate of the Action Plan.  1.2b Survey BSL users to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken and explore whether additional actions are needed.  New actions will be included in this Action Plan. | | | Biannually  (May and November)  By May 2027 | | | BSL users are surveyed every two years and new actions (if needed) are included in this action plan.  85% of the actions within the University’s BSL Plan 2024 – 2030 are completed within the specified timeframe. |
|  | Publish a progress report at the midway point of the BSL Plan. | | | | 1.3a An update on progress on the BSL Plan is provided to the Planning Directorate in 2025 in line with Aberdeen 2040 timeframes.  1.3b A midway report is produced and published on the University’s [British Sign Language Plan webpage](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/british-sign-language-13353.php) | | | By August 2025  By May 2027 | | | A progress report on the actions within the BSL Plan is produced and shared with relevant groups in the University’s governance structures. |
|  | Work with listed authorities and the BSL community to establish best practice, share knowledge and improve the development of our BSL Plan. | | | | 1.4a Develop a list of local partners and BSL groups and establish a collaboration with them.  1.4b Local partners and BSL groups will be invited to attend the University’s BSL Plan Working Group meetings. | | | By May 2027 | | | Relationships with local partners and the local BSL community are established and maintained.  Collaborate with local partners through sharing knowledge, experiences and best practice where required. |
|  | Through collaboration with relevant groups, identify where inclusive communication with BSL users can be enhanced. | | | | A survey is developed to ascertain how communications can be improved for BSL users. | | | By May 2027 | | | Inclusive communications are enhanced and improved. |
|  | Develop guidance on BSL access for engagement and events. | | | | Relevant groups and individuals are consulted, and the guidance is approved through the University’s governance structures. | | | By May 2025 | | | Comprehensive guidance on making engagement activities and events accessible to BSL users is developed. |
| **Priority 2:** BSL Accessibility  **Our long-term goal:** Ensure information is accessible to BSL users by increasing people’s awareness of communication tools and technology. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | **Milestone** | | | | | **Timescale** | | **Success Measure** | |
|  | | Improve the accessibility of the University of Aberdeen’s website for BSL users and increase awareness of the Digital Accessibility Toolkit and related training. | 2.1a Liaise, on a regular basis, with the Digital Accessibility Working Group to ensure the accessibility of the University website is improved.  2.1b Promote, biannually,  the Digital Accessibility Toolkit and training through the Staff Newsletter and relevant groups.  2.1c Consider the use of a real-time BSL translator software. | | | | | Ongoing  Ongoing  By Dec 2026 | | Accessibility for BSL users is implemented across the University’s websites.  Toolkit and training are promoted regularly. | |
|  | | Continue to promote the use of Contact Scotland BSL, Scotland’s BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service. | Promote, biannually, Contact Scotland BSL via Staff and Student Newsletters. | | | | | Biannually (October and April) | | Awareness of Contact Scotland BSL is raised through Staff and Student newsletters, University webpages and email signature. | |
|  | | Once launched, promote the use of SignPort as an online portal for BSL/English interpreter bookings. | Raise Awareness of SignPort through Staff and Student Newsletter and to relevant teams across the University. | | | | | By December 2024 | | SignPort is promoted to relevant teams and via the Staff Newsletter. | |
|  | | Increase BSL knowledge. | After gathering expressions of interests from staff, students, and local partners, consider the introduction of a basic BSL course. | | | | | AY 2024-2025  (annually) | | BSL course up and running, and well-attended. | |
| **Priority 3:** Access to Employment  **Our long-term goal:** Support BSL users to develop the necessary skills that will enable them to enter and progress in their chosen career. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | | **Milestone** | | | | **Timescale** | | **Success Measure** | |
|  | | Develop opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, helping them understand the support available to them and develop their skills. | | 3.1a Develop a suite of resources and services to support students transitioning into and navigating the workplace, accessible to and designed to meet the specific needs of deaf and deafblind students.  3.1b Ensure the University graduate attribute and skills framework and skills development pathways are fully accessible and designed to meet the specific needs of deaf and deafblind students. | | | | By May 2026  By May 2026 | | Deaf and deafblind students are supported to prepare for transitioning into and navigating the workplace.  Deaf and deafblind students are able to review, develop and articulate their skills during their studies. | |
|  | | Identify solutions to specific barriers for BSL users accessing employability support. | | 3.2a Conduct a mapping exercise identifying accessible, appropriate and available internal and external employability support for BSL users, considering the specific barriers they face.  3.2b Develop institution wide referral mechanisms to ensure BSL users can access all available employability support. | | | | By May 2025  By May 2026 | | BSL users are effectively connected with appropriate and timely employability support to overcome the specific barriers they face. | |
| **Priority 4:** Health and Wellbeing  **Our long-term goal:** BSL users will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make informed choices at every stage of their lives. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | | | **Milestone** | | | **Timescale** | | **Success Measure** | |
|  | | Ensure mental health information and services are accessible to all individuals, including those who use BSL. | | | A statement on accessibility is developed and added to the staff and student services, support and wellbeing to make clear that arrangements for a BSL interpreter can be made where requested. | | | By May 2027 | | Relevant content is translated into BSL and BSL interpreters are present when necessary. | |
|  | | Deliver BSL training to staff and students involved in mental health and wellbeing roles. | | | 4.2a Identify suitable BSL training providers.  4.2b Invite relevant staff and students to take part in BSL training. | | | By May 2027 | | BSL taster sessions are delivered to relevant staff and students. | |
| **Priority 5:** Celebrating BSL Culture  **Our long-term goal:** BSL users will have full access to cultural life of the University of Aberdeen, and equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and deaf culture with the University of Aberdeen community. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | | | **Milestone** | | **Timescale** | | **Success Measure** | | |
|  | | Enable BSL users to take part in culture and arts as participants and audience members. | | | 5.1a Advertised events request accessibility information as part of the booking process for both online and in person events.  5.1b The Events team review bookings to ensure accessibility requirements, including the provision of a BSL interpreter, can be actioned. | | By May 2025 | | BSL interpreters are available when requested. | | |
|  | | Collaborate with BSL organisations to celebrate BSL culture and heritage to strengthen the community, share their rich and vibrant culture, and feel more widely valued within society. | | | Consider organising, in partnership with local partners, a Festival/events which celebrate the BSL culture and heritage. | | By May 2027 | | Festival/events organised and well-attended/received. | | |
|  | | Increase deaf awareness among staff and students. | | | Annually release a communication to staff and students to mark the ‘Deaf Awareness week’ and to increase awareness of the University services and support available for deaf and deafblind people. | | Annually | | Awareness of services and support available at the University for deaf and deafblind people increases (awareness assessed through annual consultation with BSL users) | | |
| **Priority 6:** BSL Data  **Our long-term goal:** To strengthen the data on the BSL community in Scotland to better inform decision making and service design. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | | | **Milestone** | | **Timescale** | | | **Success Measure** | |
|  | | Encourage existing and prospective staff and students to disclose if they are BSL users and update MyHR and Registry databases. | | | Produce a Staff and Student Newsletter entry encouraging staff and students to update their details. This communication will be available in BSL as well as in English. | | From May 2024 (annual communication to staff and students) | | | Data on the number of staff and students who use BSL is collected. | |
|  | | Examine existing data and intelligence from third parties to learn what principles can be applied to advance equality in service design. | | | External data and intelligence on the BSL community is gathered and examined to improve the University’s decision making and service design. Findings from this exercise is presented to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. | | By May 2025 | | | Best practice identified and implemented through this action plan. | |
| **Priority 7:** Transport  **Our long-term goal:** BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support transport use in Aberdeen. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | | | | **Milestone** | **Timescale** | | **Success Measure** | | |
|  | | Work with local transport providers to make public travel more accessible for BSL users. | | | | 7.1a Research is conducted to ascertain how public transport can be more accessible for BSL users.  7.1b Establish a working relationship with Stagecoach, First Bus and ScotRail.  Initiatives to improve public transport for BSL users could be piloted on the 7U shuttle bus that operates between Hillhead Campus, the Old Aberdeen Campus and the Foresterhill Campus. | By May 2026 | | Accessibility of transport for BSL users in Aberdeen is enhanced. | | |
| **Priority 8:** Democratic Participation  **Our long-term goal:** BSL users will be fully involved in democratic processes at the University of Aberdeen. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Item** | | **Action** | | | **Milestone** | | **Timescale** | | | **Success Measure** | |
|  | | Facilitate BSL support in electoral campaigns and the election process to ensure BSL users can make informed decisions with access to all relevant information. | | | Where possible online campaign content is translated into BSL.  BSL interpreters are present at crucial events. | | By May 2028 | | | BSL interpreters are available and materials are available in BSL where required. | |