

The British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Bill passed unanimously



The British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Bill was passed unanimously by all Parties in the Chamber in the Scottish Parliament today.

The British Deaf Association (BDA) is delighted to acknowledge this historic landmark which will work towards improving the daily life of the Scottish Deaf population and could shake up where the Deaf community choose to call home.

BSL users in Scotland from the cradle to the grave will be greatly affected by the BSL (Scotland) Bill. This recognition of their first and preferred language will improve their access, inclusion and sense of belonging in Scotland. In terms of education, the younger generation of the Deaf community will now be entitled to equal opportunities, and therefore be able to cultivate similar beliefs about their future to their hearing peers which is a very important goal for BDA.

The BSL (Scotland) Bill will also positively impact quality of life in relation to health, the elderly, employment, leisure and arts. In terms of health, Deaf people will have better access to medical care, for example, hospital information leaflets will have to be translated into BSL. From a jobs and employment perspective, more Deaf people will be able to access work as BSL, and the use of BSL Interpreters, becomes more visible and more employers learn about relevant support programmes.

The BSL (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced by Mark Griffin MSP on the 29 October 2014, received support from MSPs, Deaf organisations and individuals across Scotland and importantly the Deaf Community. In four weeks, the Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick MSP) will submit the Bill for Royal Assent and, once granted, it will become an Act of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government and relevant public authorities will then be required to develop a BSL national plan setting out how they will improve access to information in British Sign Language (BSL).

BDA Scotland has been heavily involved with the process from the start when the organisation was invited to respond to the Education and Culture committee panel in the Scottish Parliament in support of the Bill. The organisation is delighted to see this Bill successfully passed in the Scottish Parliament.

"Today is a momentous day for the Scottish Deaf Community. The success of the BSL (Scotland) Bill is a wonderful achievement and we would like to give special thanks to Mark Griffin MSP, Hilary Third of the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee and everyone involved for their help. It is through this close collaboration and partnership that this momentous day has been made possible," said Avril Hepner, the BDA's Community Development Manager in Scotland.

"I am proud, as a Scottish person, to see my country leading the way in making the first ever BSL Act in the UK. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government to implement this and hope the rest of the UK follows suit," Avril continued.