

**Debate Pack**

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# British Sign Language report 2022 and implementation of the British Sign Language Act 2022

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# 1

## British Sign Language Act 2022

The [British Sign Language Act 2022](#) received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022. It originated as a [Private Members' Bill](#), introduced to the House of Commons on 16 June 2021 by Rosie Cooper MP.

The Bill was introduced following the [ballot process](#). At the start of a new parliamentary year, backbench MPs are invited to enter their names into a ballot and 20 names are drawn. Each MP whose name is drawn may present a bill of their choosing. Only the top seven ballot bills are guaranteed any debate.

Whilst Rosie Cooper came in 20<sup>th</sup> place in the ballot, the British Sign Language Bill swiftly attracted cross-party and, crucially, [government support](#).<sup>1</sup> This was attributed partly to awareness of BSL raised by Rose Ayling-Ellis, a deaf actress and BSL user who won the television dance competition, *Strictly Come Dancing*, in 2021.

[During the Bill's second reading debate](#) Rosie Cooper told MPs:

I want to finally recognise BSL in statute—not just a gesture but a law that requires positive action from the Government, with real progress to put deaf people on an equal footing with those of us who hear.

[...] this recognition will be clear and a message that their language is equal and should be treated as equal.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1

### The Act's provisions

The British Sign Language Act 2022 has three main sections.

[Section 1](#) provides that “British Sign Language is recognised as a language of England, Wales and Scotland.” Northern Ireland is not included as the relevant law is devolved to Northern Ireland.

Whilst there are no official languages in the UK, nor any clear mechanism in UK law via which a language can acquire official status, recognising a language in law can help to encourage its use and recognise its cultural importance. There are other examples of this, eg, The [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) gave the Welsh language official status in Wales, and the [Gaelic Language \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) established a body (the Bòrd na Gàidhlig) to promote the use and understanding of Gaelic language. Scotland

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb 28 January 2022 c1257

<sup>2</sup> HC Deb 28 January 2022 cc1225-1227

has its own BSL Act - the [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) - which requires Scottish Ministers to promote the use and understanding of BSL.

[Section 2](#) of the 2022 Act created a duty for the Secretary of State to “prepare and publish a British Sign Language report for each reporting period”. The report must describe what each relevant government department has done to promote or facilitate the use of BSL in its communications with the public. The relevant government departments are those listed in the [Schedule](#) to the Act. The list includes only the main central government departments; arms-length and non-departmental public bodies are not included.

The first reporting period ended on 30 April 2023, and under section 2(6) the Secretary of State was required to publish the report no more than three months after that date. The [British Sign Language \(BSL\) report 2022](#) was published on 31 July 2023 (see below). Subsequent reports must be published every three years.

[Section 3](#) of the Act provides that the “Secretary of State must issue guidance, or arrange for guidance to be issued, about the promotion and facilitation of the use of British Sign Language.” The government has not brought section 3 into force and there is no date set for when it will come into force. Under [section 4\(4\)](#) of the Act, section 3 would come into force on a date appointed by the Secretary of State, by way of statutory instrument.

## 2

# The British Sign Language report 2022

[The Government published the first statutory BSL report on 31 July 2023](#). It describes activities undertaken by relevant government departments to promote or facilitate the use of BSL in communications with the public.<sup>3</sup>

The report includes a list of case studies showing what it describes as good practice in government departments. For example, it highlights a dedicated [YouTube BSL channel](#).

The report also sets out the next steps that the government intends to take to encourage better departmental communication with the Deaf community. These include:

- Publishing a BSL report every year for the next five years, instead of the statutory minimum of every three years.
- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will ask each ministerial department to produce a 5-year BLS plan.
- BSL guidance under section 3 of the Act (which is yet to be commenced) will be published:

The BSL Advisory Board will advise the government on the guidance detailed in the BSL Act, and its implementation to best represent the Deaf community. This external **guidance will be published by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions during the next BSL reporting period** with support from the Cabinet Office Disability Unit.

The [Annex to the report](#) shows “BSL activity by ministerial department”. It includes a table showing, by government department, the number of public announcements about policy or law given in BSL; publications in BSL; and general social media or website use in BSL. The Cabinet Office and the Department for Work and Pensions have the most examples listed; there are 15 instances of the Cabinet Office using BSL in press conferences, social media or on its website. However, 11 of the 20 the government departments in the table have no examples listed of BSL activity.

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<sup>3</sup> The British Sign Language (BSL) report 2022, Department for Work and Pensions, 31 July 2023

## 3 Parliamentary material

### 3.1 Early day motion

#### [Deaf Awareness Week](#)

That this House looks forward to celebrating Deaf Awareness Week which will run from 2nd May to 8th May... welcomes the progress made towards passing the British Sign Language Bill and hopes that this legislation will be completed before the House prorogues; and calls on the Government to ensure that the implementation of the BSL legislation is co-designed by the Deaf community who are given the opportunity to explain for themselves how policies and services can be designed to be inclusive of Deaf BSL signers.

27 Apr 2022 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1186 (session 2021-22)

**Primary sponsor:** Cameron, Dr Lisa

### 3.2 Debates

[Queen's Speech](#) – HL Deb 17 May 2022 – 822 cc366-436

[British Sign Language Bill](#) – HL Deb 27 Apr 2022 – 821 cc276-9

[British Sign Language Bill](#) – HL Deb 25 Mar 2022 – 820 cc1212-1226

[British Sign Language Bill](#) – HC Deb 18 Mar 2022 - 710 cc1195-1224

[British Sign Language Bill. Committee stage \(morning\)](#). – HC Deb 23 Feb 2022

[British Sign Language Bill](#) – HC Deb 28 Jan 2022 - 707 cc1233-1268

### 3.3 Statement

[UK's 2022 Follow-up Report to the 2016 Inquiry by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

15 Dec 2022 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS454

[Disability Update](#)

13 Jun 2022 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS93

## 3.4

# Parliamentary questions

### Sign Language: Education

**Asked by:** Thomas, Derek

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment his Department's Disability Unit has made of the (a) adequacy of availability of and (b) strength of demand for courses in British Sign Language.

**Answering member:** Tom Pursglove | **Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

The Disability Unit does not keep statistics on the adequacy of availability, or strength of demand, for courses in British Sign Language, as this would be a matter for the Department for Education.

A British Sign Language (BSL) Advisory Board has been established to help advise the Government on the implementation of the British Sign Language Act 2022. This Act legally recognises BSL as a language of England, Wales and Scotland. It requires government departments to report on how they are ensuring accessibility of their communications through the use of BSL. The BSL Advisory Board is a new expert committee which will advise the Government on the implementation of the BSL Act and other matters important to BSL signers. Amongst other things, the Board will advise on how to increase the numbers of qualified and registered BSL interpreters.

07 Sep 2023 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 195473

Date tabled: 20 Jul 2023 | Date for answer: 04 Sep 2023 | Date answered: 07 Sep 2023

### British Sign Language Act 2022

**Asked by:** Bell, Aaron

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what progress she has made on implementing the British Sign Language Act 2022.

**Answering member:** Mims Davies | **Department:** Women and Equalities

The British Sign Language Act includes a duty on the DWP Secretary of State to publish a report on the use of British Sign Language in public communications by ministerial departments.

The first reporting period was completed on the 30th of April this year and the report is due to be published in Summer.

In addition, DWP has established a dual language board of BSL users to inform HMG on BSL matters.

07 Jun 2023 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 905242

Date tabled: 25 May 2023 | Date for answer: 07 Jun 2023 | Date answered: 07 Jun 2023

**Department for Work and Pensions: Sign Language**

**Asked by:** Owen, Sarah

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress his department has made with implementing the British Sign Language Act 2022.

**Answering member:** Tom Pursglove | **Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

The British Sign Language Act 2022 gained Royal Assent in April 2022 and does three things:

It recognises British Sign Language as a language of Great Britain in its own right;

It places a duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to report on the promotion and facilitation of British Sign Language by ministerial departments; and

It places a duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to issue guidance to ministerial departments on the general promotion and facilitation of British Sign Language across their public communications - such as public announcements, consultations, plans, strategy, social media and press conferences.

On Tuesday 9 May, the members of the British Sign Language (BSL) Advisory Board met for the first time. Establishing the Board is a significant step in the implementation of the Act. The Board's role is to advise the Government on key issues impacting the Deaf community. The Board's remit includes: advising on the use of BSL in public communications and policy delivery, including input to the guidance outlined in part 3 of the Act; and advising on how to tackle key issues facing Deaf people, such as how to increase the numbers of BSL interpreters.

Work continues across Government to ensure that the departments named in the schedule to the Act are aware of their reporting duty. The first reporting period runs from 28 June 2022 to 30 April 2023 and departments will report on their use of BSL in public communications after the end of the reporting period. The second meeting of senior officials representing the departments due to report on their use of BSL will take place in May.

11 May 2023 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 183820

Date tabled: 03 May 2023 | Date for answer: 09 May 2023 | Date answered: 11 May 2023

### **British Sign Language**

**Asked by:** Chloe Smith

I welcome that update. Will the advisory board be on track ahead of that first statutory reporting date? When will the statutory guidance be commenced? Furthermore, will my hon. Friend commit to the Government's major public broadcasts being fully accessible?

**Answered by:** Mims Davies | **Department:** Women and Equalities

My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the first meeting of the Departments driving the Act is due to take place in mid-February. It is vital that the 20 Departments listed in the schedule deliver the commitments. The advisory board will be the first dual-language board advising His Majesty's Government, which demonstrates our commitment to the deaf community. It will form the vital guidance on the Act, and it will rightly look at BSL for major public broadcasts, which many of our constituents want to see and have asked for.

25 Jan 2023 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 726 c996

Date answered: 25 Jan 2023

### **British Sign Language**

**Asked by:** Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)

What recent progress she has made in implementing the British Sign Language Act 2022.

**Answered by:** The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies) | **Department:** Women and Equalities

I thank my right hon. Friend for her important work in delivering the Act. Work continues across Government to ensure that the Departments named in the schedule to the Act are aware of their reporting duty. They will report on their use of BSL in public communications at the end of the first reporting period on 28 June.

25 Jan 2023 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Commons | 903309 | 726 cc995-6

Date tabled: 19 Jan 2023 | Date for answer: 25 Jan 2023 | Date answered: 25 Jan 2023



## Sign Language

**Asked by:** Jarvis, Dan

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to promote the use of British Sign Language.

**Answering member:** Chloe Smith | **Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

The Government is committed to supporting all people with a disability, including deaf people, to lead fulfilled, independent lives. For D/deaf people, we recognise that this must include the ability to communicate with others through British Sign Language (BSL) or other forms of deaf communication.

I have been working closely with Rosie Cooper MP to support the aims and development of her Private Members Bill to promote BSL. We have also held a number of stakeholder forums, including with deaf people's organisations such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and British Deaf Association, to ensure that we understand the views and perspectives of D/deaf BSL users.

The British Sign Language Bill is a major step forward in recognising BSL as a language for D/deaf people in its own right. It will place a duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to issue guidance on the promotion and facilitation of BSL. It will also require them to report on information supplied by ministerial Departments regarding their use of BSL. This reporting will give us a much better understanding of how BSL is being used across the government, and how we can continue to improve communication for D/deaf BSL users.

I will also be creating a non-statutory board of BSL users which can advise the Government on matters pertaining to BSL. To complement the approach set out in the Bill, we are also developing a suite of non-statutory measures which will help promote and facilitate the use of BSL. These include:

- examining how we might increase the number of BSL interpreters;
- reviewing how we might work in DWP to ensure the Access to Work fund helps BSL users; and
- aiming to update the National Disability Strategy to facilitate and promote BSL usage.

10 Feb 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 119587

Date tabled: 07 Feb 2022 | Date for answer: 10 Feb 2022 | Date answered: 10 Feb 2022

## 4 Media

### 4.1 Press releases

[Government's BSL Report exposes poor provision of BSL across all departments](#)

RNID

31 July 2023

["Nothing about us, without us!" – BDA concerned about the lack of BSL representation in the media as DfE opens consultation on new BSL GCSE](#)

British Deaf Association

16 June 2023

[Campaign for GCSE in British Sign Language \(BSL\) a "step closer"](#)

British Deaf Association

16 June 2023

[BSL users appointed to board advising government on key issues for Deaf people](#)

Equality Hub

Last updated 24 April 2023

[The BSL Bill will become law!](#)

RNID

27 April 2022

## 4.2

### Articles and blogs

[Reflecting on the Right to Sign campaign](#)

National Deaf Children's Society

29 September 2023

[Experts 'rewild' British Sign Language with new environmental terms](#)

Guardian

11 August 2023

[New Edinburgh University degree will address decline in teachers of deaf children](#)

Herald

05 August 2023

[Why the BSL GCSE consultation is so significant?](#)

Signature

28 June 2023

[British Sign Language GCSE one step closer as Government launches consultation](#)

Independent

15 June 2023

[British Sign Language Act: Improving how government communicates with the Deaf community](#)

Blog, Civil Service

25 January 2023

[Deaf jurors sit on crown court trials in England for first time](#)

Evening Standard

28 September 2022

[Universities work together to make Scotland top place to study BSL](#)

STV News

23 September 2022

[999 sign language service allows deaf people to call emergency services](#)

Times

17 June 2022

[British Sign Language in Scotland](#)

Scottish Parliament Information Centre

07 March 2022

[British Sign Language Bill passes second reading](#)

Personnel Today

31 January 2022

[Let's give British sign language the status it deserves](#)

Times

28 January 2022

## 5

### Further reading

[BSL National Plan 2023-2029 – ALLIANCE consultation response](#)

Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland

01 September 2023

[The British Sign Language – national plan: progress report](#)

Scottish Government

27 October 2021

[British Sign Language \(BSL\): National Plan 2017 to 2023](#)

Scottish Government

24 October 2017

[The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body: British Sign Language Plan 2018-2024](#)

Scottish Government

2018

[BSL \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)

The Scottish Government's information, resources and guidance for public bodies related to the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015

Scottish Government

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