

British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry

May 2025

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is a public body created by the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006. We are an independent, expert body that works with and for the people of Scotland; we monitor, listen, speak up for all of our rights and respond when things go wrong. The Commission is also part of the international human rights system. It is accredited by the United Nations as its trusted organisation to provide impartial evidence on the enjoyment of human rights in Scotland. The Commission is independent of Government. We are accountable to the people of Scotland via the Scottish Parliament.

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Introduction

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry. As a listed authority under Section 6 of the Act, it is not for us to comment on the difference these plans have made to BSL users or the need for future reforms, this assessment should come from BSL users and their representative organisations. Instead, within this response we have outlined for the Equalities, Human Rights & Civil Justice Committee the actions the SHRC has undertaken in relation to implementation of the second National BSL Plan from 2023.

Implementation of the 2023 National BSL Plan

In 2024 the SHRC published its new BSL plan¹, this plan was framed around the long-term goals from Scottish Government's BSL National Plan 2023-2029 which are most relevant to the Scottish Human Rights Commission in consultation with the British Deaf Association and members of Deaf Action Scotland (Up to 20 members consulted with at event on 11th April 2024). Based on this consultation we chose to focus on the delivery of three long-term goals. These were, BSL Accessibility, Access to Employment and Democratic Participation and in taking advice from the British Deaf Association we split our commitments into short term, medium term and long-term commitments.

In relation to each of the three long term goals the following short term and medium-term actions have been delivered:

- BSL Accessibility
 - Increase resources available in BSL, for example, on our website and YouTube channel. All spotlight work outputs produced in BSL. For example please see short film, [Measuring Change: Our Stories of Institutionalisation with BSL](#) and [Tick Tock: Measuring human rights progress in moving from institutions to independent living in Scotland](#).
 - Create a dedicated BSL page on our website available here [British Sign Language \(BSL\) | Scottish Human Rights Commission](#)
 - Make as many new website publications as possible available in BSL. For example, please see: [SHRC Participation Strategy in BSL](#) and the [SHRC Annual Report 2023-2024](#).

- Access to Employment
 - Establish a BSL taskforce, responsible for progressing actions in the BSL Plan. This was established in November 2024 with quarterly meetings.
- Democratic Participation
 - Consult Deaf-led organisations to identify the best channels to reach BSL users. Completed as part of consultation on new BSL Plan.
 - Establish a Participation Strategy which considers BSL users. The SHRC's [Participation Strategy](#) was published in March 2025. This commits the SHRC to the provision of BSL when needed for rights holders to participate in the work of the Commission.
 - Provide BSL support for participation opportunities. BSL support has been provided for public event on sharing experiences to inform SHRC's submission to the UK Review on International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In terms of next steps for the remainder of 2025, the SHRC will seek to deliver establishment of a BSL awareness training schedule for staff and members of the Commission, establishing a BSL Plan working group with other public bodies, to share best practice and learn from each other and the creation a mailing list of deaf-led organisations to promote new resources directly to BSL users.

At this stage the impact of the SHRC's BSL Plan has not yet been fully evaluated. We would therefore welcome any feedback from the Equalities, Human Rights & Civil Justice Committee from Deaf led organisations and BSL users on their experience engaging with the SHRC. This strategy will be evaluated at the end of its delivery in 2029.

Conclusion

Following the publication of the SHRC's strategic plan for 2024-2028², the SHRC has undertaken a programme of work to embed its values as an accessible human rights watchdog for the people of Scotland. This has included enhancing our provision of BSL for all major outputs and key strategic documents, offering BSL translation at Commission events and establishing an organisational BSL taskforce to deliver against actions included in our BSL plan for 2024-2030. The impact this plan has had is yet to be fully evaluated and therefore we would welcome feedback from the

Equalities, Human Rights & Civil Justice Committee Inquiry on the perceived impact of the SHRC's work in this area to date.

For more information on any element of this response, please contact:
hello@scottishhumanrights.com

¹ See: British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-30

² See: SHRC Strategic Plan 2024-28