



Queen Margaret University  
EDINBURGH

# **British Sign Language (BSL)** Action Plan 2018-2024

# Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

## British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan 2018-2024

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## SECTION 2:

### 2.1 Introduction

This is the BSL Plan for Queen Margaret University (QMU), as required by the BSL (Scotland) Act. It sets out actions we will take over the period 2018-2024. It follows the BSL National Plan, published on 24 October 2017, which was developed through extensive engagement with Deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. It is framed around the same long-term goals as the national plan, where these are relevant to the work of this organisation.

At QMU, we are highly committed to protecting and promoting BSL. In our organisational structure, we have the HR department and the Disability Service that work towards ensuring that BSL users<sup>1</sup> at QMU are properly supported.

We have experience of supporting BSL users as students and occasional staff on programmes within QMU and ensuring they are fully supported during their studies. We are committed to building on this.

QMU has already established an MSc programme for registered BSL/English interpreters, which is a unique provision to upskill interpreters in specialist fields of work. The strategic importance of this has been recognised by the Scottish Government through the 'Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund' as it aligns directly with actions 8, 47 and 62 from the BSL National Plan. However, the programme indirectly promotes many of the other actions within the plan.

QMU is also developing further opportunities for BSL awareness-raising at undergraduate and postgraduate levels through the employment of a part-time lecturer who is a BSL user. These developments will help embed an understanding of the issues affecting BSL users.

We are committed to an action plan, which is ambitious, responsive, builds on our progress and which is continually shaped by national initiatives, local needs and the priorities of BSL users. Our actions will be embedded into our Inclusive Learning and Teaching Materials Policy and feedback sought continually from students and staff through informal and formal mechanisms, including staff development and workshop sessions.

QMU will commit to contributing to the National Progress Report in 2020 through submission of data analytics and information requests as required to enable us to build on our progress and take us closer to the national long-term goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Wherever we refer to 'BSL users' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

## 2.2 Name and contact details of lead officer

Our lead officer is:

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## 2.3 Where to find the BSL version of this plan

You can find our BSL Action Plan on the QMU You Tube Channel at <https://bit.ly/2vHpMjd> or on the QMU website at <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/study-here/student-services/bsl-action-plan/>.

## SECTION 3:

### Short summary of the plan

Our QMU Action Plan focuses on improving access, removing barriers, improving experience, and removing obstacles through addressing the following nine key National themes:

- **Across all our services – Public Services**  
(Ensuring information and services are accessible to BSL users)
- **Family Support, Early learning and Childcare**  
(GIRFEC ‘Getting it right for every child’ approach)
- **School Education**  
(Reaching full potential through continual support)
- **Post-School Education**  
(Receive the support BSL users need to do well)
- **Training, Work and Social Security**  
(Skills development to reach potential and improve progression)
- **Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing**  
(Information access to enable informed choices)
- **Culture and the Arts**  
(Access to existing services but ability to shape and share with others)
- **Justice**  
(Equal access)
- **Democracy**  
(Active and informed citizens)

In doing so, we set out our aims, commitment and the associated actions to ensure that our D/deaf and Deafblind students are supported in their ability to learn, work, be creative, live life to the full and to make their contributions to our communities, our culture and our economy. We commit to playing our part in the shared Scottish Government vision that Scotland be the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit.

Our associated key actions centre around heightening awareness within QMU, training staff (particularly front of house staff) and students, consulting with and responding to BSL users.

## SECTION 4:

### BSL ACTION PLAN 2018-2024 for Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

#### 4.1 Across all our services – Public Services

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

*“Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users.”*



#### Our Actions

##### By 2024, we will:

**Analyse existing evidence** we have about students and prospective students who use BSL in our University; identify and fill key information gaps so that we can establish baselines and measure our progress.

We will create an open and transparent support service, which will include:

- Changing our 2019 application paperwork/processes for postgraduate students to include a field ‘What is your first language?’
- Ensuring that the tracking and monitoring processes for the existing evidence is robust, systematically analysed and reported on an annual basis.

**Improve information and services** for students and prospective students who use BSL, including making our website more welcoming to BSL users.

This process will involve:

- Ensuring there is appropriate BSL medium information on our web site.
- Providing a BSL Interpreter at interview.
- Making reasonable adjustments to student materials to incorporate BSL where appropriate.
- Provide BSL interpretation at QMU and QMUSU events where appropriate.
- Where possible support will be provided to support the wider student experience (for example accommodation & social orientation events) in order to increase a sense of belonging for all students and support retention.

**Promote the use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service** called ‘contactSCOTLAND-BSL’, which allows BSL users to contact public sector services and for these services to contact them.

This process will involve:

- Raising awareness of the service to relevant staff and students.
- Providing support, direction and a private space for potential users to guide them and support them in accessing the above facility.

**Signpost staff who work with BSL users to appropriate BSL awareness training, and enable them to take up such training.**

This process will involve:

- Identifying who the appropriate QMU staff are (front of house and staff who have direct contact with students who are BSL users).
- Delivering BSL awareness training at an appropriate level to these individuals.
- Offering ongoing support and advice as required.
- Identify and advertise which members of staff are able to communicate in BSL and keep this information up to date.

Beyond 2024, we would wish to encourage all staff to take up training in BSL as and where appropriate.

## 4.2 Post-School Education

We share the long-term goal for post-school education set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:



*“BSL users will be able to maximise their potential at school, will be supported to transition to post-school education if they wish to do so, and will receive the support they need to do well in their chosen subject(s)”*

### Our Actions

**By 2024, we will:**

**Take action to ensure that students and prospective students who are BSL users are properly supported.**

Using the expertise and experience of our Disability Service staff, we will ensure the following identified targets are addressed, actioned and implemented appropriately:

- Providing accessible information about what BSL users can expect from the university.
- Ensuring appropriate access to open days for prospective students who use BSL.
- Supporting students who use BSL when they apply to the University and commence their study (including open days, completing application forms, interviews, applying for Disabled Students Allowance, induction week etc.).
- Providing assistance for students who use BSL with the completion of re-application for DSA funding each year.

**Use the expertise of our academics from the Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences to inform and further drive QMU efforts in contributing to the achievement of the goals set out in the National Plan and beyond.**

This will involve:

- Delivering postgraduate training to registered BSL/English interpreters to promote their development of specialist skills in domains of work including healthcare, mental health, justice, education, culture, and employment.
- Developing and delivering opportunities for all undergraduate and postgraduate students at QMU to undertake study on working with BSL users and the implications for their professional practice.

**Use the expertise of our academics from the Division of Psychology and Sociology to inform and drive further QMU efforts in contributing to ‘removing barriers that prevent BSL users from becoming teachers’ (action 16 of the National Plan).**

This will involve:

- In collaboration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), the Division of Psychology and Sociology are developing an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme that optimises accessibility for BSL users. Upon completion of the ITE programme, students will be equipped with the skills that enable them to 1) provide to children and young people who use BSL the support they need at all stages of their learning so that they can reach their full potential, and 2) ensure that parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child’s education. With a view to achieving this goal, colleagues in the Division are working with BSL experts in the Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences to ensure that BSL is fully integrated into the ITE programme provided at QMU.

**Take on board guidance/advice produced by the SFC and others to ensure that, across the university, staff are aware of their responsibilities towards BSL users, and that students who use BSL know what to expect.**

This will involve:

- Awareness raising sessions/campaigns.
- Consultation and discussion sessions.
- Responsive actioning of SFC and local guidance through our Disability Service.

**Embed the development of our BSL Plan into the operational activity of the University**

This will involve:

- Inviting continuous feedback from students/prospective students and staff who use BSL over the coming year/18 months after adopting this plan.
- Seeking continual feedback from staff and students through both informal and formal mechanisms.
- Acting on feedback from staff and students to refresh and review the BSL Plan.
- Including feedback from the national progress report (due in October 2020).
- Embedding actions from the BSL Plan within Divisional Operational Plans.



### 4.3 Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:



*“The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a D/deaf or Deafblind child and their family offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL.”*

#### Our Actions

**By 2024, we will:**

#### **Make progress toward the long-term goal for family support, early learning and childcare through**

- Continue and build on current provision within Audiology and SLT education, which emphasises the importance of BSL and Deaf Culture in habilitation.
- Delivering specialist training for BSL/English interpreters on working with BSL users in nursery education through the MSc module on Interpreting in Educational Settings.
- Developing and delivering opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate students at QMU to undertake study on working with BSL users and the implications for their professional practice.
- Using interpreters where relevant so that family who use BSL are able to be involved with public events such as open days and graduation.

### 4.4 School Education

We share the long-term goal for school education set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

*“Children and young people who use BSL will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child’s education; and more pupils will be able to learn BSL at school”*

#### Our Actions

**By 2024, we will:**

#### **Make progress toward the long-term goal for school education through**

- Delivering specialist training for BSL/English interpreters on working with BSL users in primary and secondary education through the MSc module on Interpreting in Educational Settings.

- In collaboration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), the Division of Psychology and Sociology are developing an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme that optimises accessibility for BSL users. Upon completion of the ITE programme, students will be equipped with the skills that enable them to 1) provide to children and young people who use BSL the support they need at all stages of their learning so that they can reach their full potential, and 2) ensure that parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child’s education. With a view to achieving this goal, colleagues in the Division are working with BSL experts in the Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences to ensure that BSL is fully integrated into the ITE programme provided at QMU

#### 4.5 Training, Work and Social Security

We share the long-term goal for training, work and social security set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:



*“BSL users will be supported to develop the skills they need to become valued members of the Scottish workforce, so that they can fulfil their potential, and improve Scotland’s economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career”*

#### Our Actions

**By 2024, QMU will:**

**Raise awareness of the UK Government’s ‘Access to Work’ scheme** for students who use BSL towards the end of their course, so that they can benefit from the support it provides when they enter the world of work.

At QMU, we have a very clear ethos as regards fulfilling the potential of all BSL users. We strongly commit to the view that BSL users are encouraged to become self-dependant and empowered members of the community. Our strategic direction revolves around independence and empowerment.

We will do this through:

- raising awareness of the opportunities available to BSL staff and student BSL users through the Access to Work scheme;
- frame with BSL staff and student users the concept of what tools, equipment and support they require to be enabled in their work capacity;
- implementation of our Inclusive Learning and Teaching Materials Policy;
- delivering specialist training for BSL/English interpreters on working with BSL users in employment through the MSc module on Interpreting in Employment Settings.

We will also progress toward the long-term goal for training, work and social security through:

- when requested, providing appropriate advice to placement providers to ensure work placements in industry are supported appropriately.
- signposting the appropriate support for any social security issues.
- advising on, and promoting, the future career options available to students who use BSL.

**Take action to ensure that staff who are BSL users are properly supported.**

Using the expertise and experience of our Disability Service staff to inform HR exactly what support users may require, we will ensure the following identified targets are addressed, actioned and implemented appropriately:

- ensuring BSL users can remain in and progress their chosen career;
- working with Health and Safety Adviser to best utilise support available from Access to Work;
- inviting all staff to attend Deaf Awareness Training.

#### 4.6 Health (including social care), mental health and wellbeing

We share the long-term goal for health, mental health and wellbeing set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:



*“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.”*

#### **Our Actions**

**By 2024, we will:**

**Take steps to ensure that mental health services (including wellbeing and counselling services) within the QMU are fully accessible to students who use BSL.**

This is particularly important given the statistic that deaf people are significantly more likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

We will support this by ensuring:

- all BSL users have access to all QMU support mechanisms for mental health and wellbeing.
- all staff are invited to attend Deaf Awareness Training.
- all BSL users are aware of the services available and are directed to them appropriately.

**Raise awareness of BSL and Deaf culture and the needs of BSL users accessing health and social care.**

We will achieve this by:

- continuing to develop opportunities for healthcare students to engage with BSL users following a successful pilot involving QMU students working with BSL/English interpreting students from Heriot-Watt University.
- delivering specialist training for BSL/English interpreters on working with BSL users in health and mental health through the MSc modules on Interpreting in Healthcare Settings and Interpreting in Mental Healthcare Settings.
- developing and delivering opportunities for all undergraduate and postgraduate students at QMU to undertake study on working with BSL users and the implications for their professional practice
- as appropriate, making information available on accommodation and extra-curricular activities such as sports centre and SU events.

#### 4.7 Culture and the Arts

We share the long-term goal for culture and the arts set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

*“BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and Deaf Culture with the people of Scotland”*



#### Our Actions

**By 2024, we will:**

**Take action to ensure that extracurricular and recreational activities offered within QMU are accessible to students who use BSL through:**

- closer partnership working with our Students' Association and Res Life Team to drive communication forward.
- providing BSL Interpreters at QMU and QMUSU events where appropriate.

**Improving access to arts and culture events through:**

- Delivering specialist training for BSL/English interpreters on working with BSL users in arts and cultural contexts through the MSc module on Interpreting in Arts and Culture Settings.
- Developing and delivering opportunities for all undergraduate and postgraduate students at QMU to undertake study on working with BSL users and the implications for their professional practice.

#### 4.8 Justice

We share the long-term goal for justice set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

*“BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland”*



#### Our Actions

**By 2024, we will:**

**Progress toward the long-term goal for justice through:**

- Delivering specialist training for BSL/English interpreters on working with BSL users in various justice environments through the MSc module on Interpreting in Justice Settings.

#### 4.9 Democracy

We share the long-term goal for democracy set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

*“BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians and as board members of our public bodies”*



#### Our Actions

**By 2024, we will:**

**Progress toward the long-term goal for democracy through:**

- closer partnership working with the Students' Union and Res Life Team to ensure equality of access to representation on forums and committees and parity of ability to engage with voting processes and activities on offer; this close partnership will ensure we fully harness the BSL user voice in all our business.
- proactive encouragement of BSL user participation and representation on key university committees and working groups.

## SECTION 5:

### Ethical Considerations

- *We will ensure that any research (including undergraduate dissertations and early-stage proposals) involving BSL users and deaf people are ethically appropriate; that they pursue sensitive and least-intrusive routes towards engagement and dialogue with the community. This will entail working closely with colleagues in the Division of Speech & Hearing Sciences who have expertise in BSL in the first instance. Such colleagues will also investigate work that can be undertaken to promote ethically sound practice with BSL users and deaf people on a wider scale.*
- *Where we describe the provision of interpreting services within the plan, we will endeavour to ensure interpreters are registered with a professional regulatory body, and have appropriate experience and skills to practice in the higher education domain.*

