

British Sign Language

Plan 2024-2030



UHI

Contents



Introduction	3
Our reflections of 2018-2024	5
Actions for our plan	6
Monitoring	7
Appendix 1 + British Sign Language Plan 2018-24 progress and achievements	
Section 1: Across all services	8
Section 2: Post-school education	9
Section 3: Our contribution towards other relevant long-term goals	10

Introduction

Our British Sign Language Plan (BSLP) serves the UHI partnership as required by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

- + Sets out the actions we will take over the next six years to promote, and facilitate the promotion of the use and understanding of British Sign Language (BSL) in Scotland.

- + Reflects the aims and priority areas of the BSL National Plan 2023-29, where these are relevant to the work of the partnership.

UHI is a tertiary partnership serving our communities and connected to their needs. We offer flexible and supported learning from access level to PhD, as well as research opportunities rooted in place and purpose. The diversity and flexibility of our partnership is our greatest strength, allowing us to deliver more.

This single plan covers the UHI partnership and relates principally to our role as an education provider, rather than as an employer. The actions we have set out are informed by our experience of delivering our previous BSLP 2018-2024. As this is our second partnership-wide plan, we have updated and refined the actions we wish to take allowing greater focus on actions relevant to further and higher education, and specifically on equity and enhancement of the student experience for BSL users.

Our actions are contextualised for our partnership needs, informed by themes raised within the sector, and in consultation with the Deaf community in the Highland region. We are sincerely grateful to staff across the partnership who have contributed to the development of our BSLP, input and support from peers at NHS Highland, and the sector group for providing guidance on further and higher education BSL plans.

We will review our plan on an ongoing basis to ensure our actions are manageable, proportionate, and realistic for our partnership and we will engage in consultation wherever possible to ensure it continues to meet the needs of BSL users and other stakeholders.



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British Sign Language users can get in touch with us via Contact Scotland BSL.

Our reflections of 2018-2024

The key aims of our first British Sign Language Plan 2018-2024 was to:

+ Encourage BSL users to apply to study with us.

+ Improve the support available to BSL students.

The objectives set in our first plan were mostly aspirational. This was a conscious decision to reflect the wide-ranging nature of the first national plan and ensure that what we aimed to achieve was realistic and proportionate for the partnership, taking account of organisational and resource constraints, and the reality of supporting BSL students at UHI.

Our priorities evolved during the six-year lifetime of our previous plan and there was a change in BSL lead for the institution in 2021-22. Activity and progress as a partnership has included:

- Adding a declaration box to our higher education enrolment form to capture data on students who use BSL.
- Sharing optional NHS Highland e-learning modules with all staff.
- Working with NHS Highland to facilitate a deaf awareness training session for learning support practitioners.
- A presentation by Inclusive Practitioners' Network members at our annual staff development day around the varied and diverse issues they dealt with in supporting students who use BSL as their first language. This included looking at instances of regional variations in dialect amongst interpreters, and the key need for good communication between a wide mix of academic and support staff to get it right.
- Adding content introducing the BSL Act 2015 to UHI's Inclusive Practice Toolkit, an internal online resource for staff development and continuing professional development.
- Adding links to Contact Scotland BSL on webpages, and bookmarking student support webpages for potential BSL translation in due course.
- Discussions with UHI's careers and employability team, mental health and counselling team, Red Button feedback service and Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) about accessibility of provision for BSL users.
- Updating guidance and regulations with respect to our academic misconduct procedures to incorporate consideration of accessibility.
- Re-establishing a UHI BSL working group, to review our 2018-2024 plan and help set the direction of the new 2024-2030 plan.
- Gathering information from partners and other stakeholders to capture existing practice informing our BSLP 2024-2030 to avoid duplication of work and benchmark best practice.

Our previous BSLP strongly linked with existing practice with internal factors impacting on planned delivery (please see Appendix 1 for more information). External factors, such as the COVID pandemic (as documented in our progress questionnaire submitted to Deaf Action in 2021), also impacted on our capacity to consult on, and deliver, aspects of the plan.

We also acknowledge the challenges providing support and promoting BSL, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, including:

- The shortage of trained and qualified BSL professionals, including interpreters and tutors.
- Smaller and more dispersed BSL communities throughout the region resulting in reduced funding and less resources.

These issues affecting rural and less centralised communities in Scotland are especially acute in the geographically distributed context of the regions we serve. Such factors will inevitably impact on our ability to support BSL students and deliver on aspects of our current and future BSLP, as might the limited availability of classes to promote the use and understanding of BSL.

We referred to these issues in our response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the BSL National Plan 2023-29. We are hopeful the national plan will result in an improved infrastructure underpinning BSL in Scotland to ensure education providers, particularly those in rural and less centralised communities, are better resourced and supported to promote BSL systematically and deliver an equivalent experience for BSL users across further and higher education.

Our previous plan was monitored primarily through discussions with our inclusive practice leads group, and more recently through our internal BSL group. A key benefit of this approach is that it has enabled us to capture existing practice and align this with agreed actions.

We have also been able to draw on the experience of practitioner colleagues who supported BSL students during the lifetime of our previous plan and our improved understanding of the practical reality of supporting BSL students has informed the approach we will take in future:

“ Supporting our BSL student was a rewarding experience, it gave us valuable insight into the world of a user which we may otherwise not have had. We had several challenges to overcome, including setting up work placements, which each presented us with different barriers of how we were going to manage to support the student with the resources we had available to us.

It has allowed us to support other staff within the partnership and discuss methods of support which we found the most successful, as well as providing the student with a positive learning experience and a good impression of what we can do to help them achieve their goals. ”

Our **reflections** of 2018-2024

Actions for our plan

To build on our progress to date, and informed by our recent experiences, we intend to progress the following actions within this plan by May 2030. These actions align mostly with the accessibility section of the Scottish Government's national plan and aim to improve our provision for BSL students.

These actions are intended to be realistic for our current partnership, managing expectations of what is achievable, and improving our long-term capacity to promote BSL as a language and support BSL users.

Area	Action	Heading in BSL National Plan 2023-2029
Enrolment data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing enrolment questions. Identify and undertake steps necessary to examine existing data to determine current numbers of BSL users, levels of BSL use, and geographical spread. Identify and undertake steps necessary to gather equivalent information in relation to staff use and knowledge of BSL. 	BSL data
Student transitions	Explore what role UHI might have in developing strong pathways to support transition for BSL users from statutory education.	Children, young people, and families
Staff knowledge and skills	<p>Improve the knowledge and skills of staff to support BSL applicants and students – i.e., increase the confidence of admissions, teaching, and support staff when supporting BSL users.</p> <p>This also includes our student association staff, careers and employability team, mental health and counselling team, and other student-facing roles such as front-of-house.</p> <p>Mechanisms to include See Hear Highland Education and Learning Services (SHHELS) training, BSL-specific fact sheet and signposting information for staff, additional content in our Inclusive Practice Toolkit resource, etc relating to the inclusive classroom.</p>	Accessibility
Use of interpreters	Develop staff guidance on booking interpreters and what to do if there are none available locally e.g.: technological solutions, especially for students who study online.	Accessibility
Promotion of BSL as a language	Increase staff awareness of BSL as a language and encourage staff to take an interest in and learn BSL.	Accessibility
BSL courses	Explore the feasibility of developing BSL courses leading to qualifications within our curriculum portfolio.	Children, young people, and families
Website accessibility and BSL content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate options to improve the accessibility of all UHI 'one-web' websites for BSL users. Explore ways to increase the availability of BSL content on UHI's website – ensuring that there are mechanisms to sense check BSL content and materials with the Deaf community. 	Accessibility
Contact Scotland BSL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase awareness of the Contact Scotland BSL service amongst support staff, including admissions. Include training for support staff around the use of this. Increase promotion of Contact Scotland BSL in email signatures by UHI staff. 	Accessibility

Monitoring

In order to monitor progress towards the actions in the present plan we will:

- + **Progress actions through existing groups where possible - these actions will be undertaken primarily through our inclusive practitioners' network and will include other support staff groups such as admissions staff, learning and teaching strategy group, student support managers and a dedicated sub-group relating to BSL.**
 - + **Maintain the BSLP as a regular standing item at UHI inclusive practice leads meetings and report annually into UHI's equality, diversity, and inclusion committee.**
 - + **Review and update our BSLP, through UHI's BSL working group and engage in consultation informed by opportunities and approaches within the sector as appropriate.**
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Section 1: Across all services

	Objective	Status	Date
1.1	Investigate if a declaration box can be added to the enrolment form.	BSL is a standalone question at higher education enrolment, titled language preference.	Academic year 2020-21
1.2	Review how we can improve information we hold about BSL users.	METIS report to be amended to show data from enrolment.	UHI Servicedesk ticket logged in December 2023
1.3	Consult with UHI corporate communication for guidance on improving information available to BSL users, including website resources.	UHI corporate communications team will support BSLP, with resource limitations, going forward. A communications plan will be required.	December 2023
1.4	Raise awareness of the Contact Scotland BSL service via internal newsletters, social media and to senior management.	Information communicated to UHI student support group.	September 2023
1.5	Signpost to the Contact Scotland BSL service on UHI's website.	Signposting added to student support webpages. Signposting also added to UHI's 'contact us' and 'course information enquiry' webpages.	Signposting added to student support webpages in September 2019, and 'contact us' and 'course information enquiry' webpages in August 2022.
1.6	Encourage staff working with BSL users to link to the Contact Scotland BSL service on their email signatures.	Link sent to UHI student experience team and inclusive practitioners' network.	July 2023
1.7	Collate a central list of training providers who offer appropriate BSL/deaf awareness training.	External resources added to our BSLP webpage. Also collated a list of sensory providers in the Highland region.	External resources added to webpage in academic year 2020-21. Sensory training providers collated in February 2024
1.8	Promote upcoming training via newsletters.	Training promoted as available via student experience team newsletter.	Promoted as available – e.g. in April 2023, to promote inclusive practitioners' network day.
1.9	Promote training providers via internal practitioner groups.	Training promoted as available via student experience team newsletter. SHHELS training, facilitated by NHS Highland, promoted to inclusive practitioners' network at the time. Equality, diversity, and inclusion manager created a SharePoint area for UHI executive office staff.	SHHELS continuing professional development in November 2022. Equality, diversity, and inclusion SharePoint area under development from October 2023
1.10	Promote internal BSL training across the partnership.	Presentation at UHI inclusive practitioners' network day 2023.	April 2023
1.11	Work with external partners to promote and deliver training opportunities.	Continuing professional development session from SHHELS facilitated by NHS Highland. SHHELS e-modules available to all UHI staff for optional completion.	Continuing professional development session from SHHELS in November 2022. SHHELS e-modules available from August 2022

Section 2: Post-school education

Objective	Status	Date
2.1	Consider which pre and post entry information should be translated to ensure BSL users know what to expect during their studies.	Three additional student webpages bookmarked for translation once plan is renewed, budget constraints permitting.
2.2	Encourage prospective and current students to disclose.	Current practice and BSL students encouraged to disclose via UHI website. UHI involvement in Universities' Scotland disabled applicants' project also relevant.
2.3	Communicate guidance/advice produced by organisations such as the Scottish Funding Council via internal newsletters, practitioner groups and online to ensure staff across the partnership are aware of their responsibilities towards BSL users.	BSL information added to UHI Inclusive Practice Toolkit (all-staff and practitioner sections).
2.4	Work with external partners to engage with BSL users to invite feedback and give updates on the BSLP.	We were unable to hold an engagement event previously (due to COVID and other factors). UHI representation planned at consultations on new BSLP.
2.5	UHI's BSL working group to meet once per semester to review the plan and its actions – and include more 'local' actions by October 2020.	UHI representation started at Highland consultation in January 2024.
2.6	Local student support teams assisting students in completing SAAS application forms and, where appropriate, signpost for further guidance.	BSL was a standing item at inclusive practitioners' network and inclusive practice leads meetings. BSL working group reconvened to review and renew BSLP.
2.6	Local student support teams assisting students in completing SAAS application forms and, where appropriate, signpost for further guidance.	Disabled applicants' project group to meet regularly from August 2023.
2.6	Local student support teams assisting students in completing SAAS application forms and, where appropriate, signpost for further guidance.	Disabled applicants' project group to meet regularly from September 2023.

Section 3: Our contribution towards other relevant long-term goals

Objective	Status	Date
3.1 Offer pre-enrolment visits and transition meetings to potential students to familiarise themselves with campuses and learning centres.	Current practice – examples to be gathered from inclusive practice leads.	Feedback from inclusive practice leads in February 2024
3.2 Work with external partners to develop transition pathways for applicants progressing from high school to college or university.	Previous discussions with UHI's schools' recruitment team. Student support group and inclusive practice leads have identified the process for obtaining information on students' Additional Support Needs from schools could be improved.	Previous discussions in academic year 2020-21. Feedback from student support group and inclusive practice leads in November 2023
3.3 Signpost Access to Work website on the Disability Matters webpage.	Link added.	September 2023
3.4 Raise awareness of Access to Work website with UHI careers and employability team.	Liaising with UHI careers and employability team to help promote the Access to Work website. Also looking at how new careers platform 'Handshake' might allow students to proactively contact and disclose support requirements to employers.	February 2024
3.5 Work with online and local partner counsellors for feedback on making counselling sessions accessible to BSL users.	Counselling accessible to BSL users due to SMS and online methods used.	November 2023
3.6 Encourage campuses and learning centres to display local travel information in appropriate spaces.	Several partners have confirmed they have live travel times displayed on digital screens in main public areas for students. Some direct students to their local council website for up-to-date information.	Approx. February 2021
3.7 Work with Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) to identify barriers and solutions to make student activities accessible.	Referenced in UHI's consultation response on the national plan and to be discussed with HISA.	Raised at HISA liaison group in February 2024
3.8 Review current procedures for non-academic and academic misconduct meetings to ensure they are accessible for BSL users.	Statement added to academic misconduct guidance and UHI regulations to clarify accessibility requirements can be considered on a case-by-case basis. Non-academic misconduct to be discussed at quality forum.	Academic misconduct guidance and regulations revised in February 2024. Non-academic misconduct to be raised with quality forum before end of academic year 2023-24.
3.9 Consider how BSL students going through the criminal justice system can be supported appropriately.	Lies out with our normal scope of support for students.	November 2023
3.10 Work with HISA to review current elections and class representative procedures and investigate how these can be made accessible for BSL users.	Referenced in UHI's consultation response on the national plan and to be discussed with HISA.	Raised at the HISA liaison group in February 2024.



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