



Law Society  
of Scotland

# Consultation Response

Consultation on the Draft British Sign Language  
(BSL) National Plan 2017 - 2023

31 May 2017



## Introduction

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The Law Society of Scotland is the professional body for over 11,000 Scottish solicitors. With our overarching objective of leading legal excellence, we strive to excel and to be a world-class professional body, understanding and serving the needs of our members and the public. We set and uphold standards to ensure the provision of excellent legal services and ensure the public can have confidence in Scotland's solicitor profession.

We have a statutory duty to work in the public interest, a duty which we are strongly committed to achieving through our work to promote a strong, varied and effective solicitor profession working in the interests of the public and protecting and promoting the rule of law. We seek to influence the creation of a fairer and more just society through our active engagement with the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments, Parliaments, wider stakeholders and our membership.

Our Equality and Diversity Committee welcomes the opportunity to consider and respond to the Scottish Governments consultation: on the Draft British Language (BSL) National Plan 2017-2023. The Committee has the following comments to put forward for consideration.

## Consultation Questions Response

As the representative body for solicitors in Scotland we have a keen interest in the goal for Justice: *"BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland"*.

The Society welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to achieving fair and equal access to Justice for BSL users. We published our submission on the BSL (Scotland) bill in video form using BSL and would encourage greater use of this means of communication.

We supported the objectives and policy intent of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

In answer to the questions in the consultation:

Q25 (a) Do you think these are the right steps under Justice?

Paragraph 48. We believe it is appropriate that the Scottish Ministers assess how the justice system could better meet the needs of BSL users, and to carry out a plan of improvements. The Society considers that this should be done in conjunction with organisations involved in the justice sector to ensure a consistent approach across the sector.

Paragraph 49. We agree that research on technologies which aim to improve BSL user access should be looked at. We suggest that this research should be shared with organisations across the sector, and BSL users for consideration and comment to assist the ministers in their consideration of the research.

Paragraph 50. We agree that appropriate guidance and resources could be developed by the justice sector to improve understanding of and response to BSL users. The Society suggests that while there should be consistency across the sector, there are many stakeholders in the sector with different roles, responsibilities and interests. Appropriate guidance and resources will depend upon the interest, responsibility and role of the organisation within the sector.

We include in our Standards of Conduct requirements upon solicitors not to discriminate on the range of protected characteristics or otherwise discriminate unlawfully.



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