

Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)

Briefing – Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice
Committee Debate: BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry

11 December 2025



The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) welcomes the opportunity to share this briefing related to the Scottish Parliament Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Debate on the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry.

Summary. The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 was flagship legislation. It – and associated national and local plans – have been key to promoting and facilitating the use and understanding of BSL. However, there remain significant implementation gaps. While the ALLIANCE welcomes the Scottish Government’s response to the Committee, we were disappointed by the limited detail on commitments that were accepted fully or partially. We call for further action and particularly for clear and regular reporting on progress on each item, with bi-lingual reports in BSL and English.

BSL network. Local delivery and support planning is key, and public bodies are vital in ensuring equality for BSL users. The ALLIANCE are pleased by the Scottish Government commitment to a BSL network for listed authorities. However, this network is neither a larger National Advisory Group nor an oversight body, both of which are needed.

BSL data. We welcome the Scottish Government acceptance of the need for better BSL data. However, there has been no substantial progress to date within this area of the national plan. The commitment to meet with the ALLIANCE and Prof. Kusters is positive but limited in scope. More ambition is needed to deliver on this area of the national plan, address known gaps, and provide evidence-based policy and SMART objectives.

Inclusion of Deafblind people. The Committee report demonstrated the minimal inclusion of and consideration for Deafblind people in planning. We welcome the acknowledgement of Deafblind Scotland’s key work in this area, and of the acceptance of the definition of Deafblindness for Scotland. However, six months after that acceptance, no guidance has been

developed or issued to clinicians and decision-makers – despite persistent campaigning from stakeholders. Deafblindness must be a higher priority for Government. Stronger reporting to Government, and clearer communication lines with Deafblind people would help ensure delivery on the ground and should be a key part of work in this area.

Education and access to BSL. Stronger commitments are needed to support BSL users' equal access to education. The Committee report and evidence sessions outlined the clear attainment gap faced by Deaf and Deafblind children and young people, and the lifelong impacts of that inequality. It is unacceptable that Scotland does not have a clear action plan to tackle the barriers Deaf and Deafblind children face in their education – particularly given the wealth of suggestions proposed. This includes the need to provide meaningful access to BSL in early years.

Scotland must commit to BSL training provision across every local authority for children and families, with accompanying routes for professional development and workforce planning for relevant professionals. The Government response on access to BSL training is limited in scope. At a minimum, a commitment to a timeline for the review of courses, services, and barriers to access, should be provided. This work must be paired with stronger reporting mechanisms on progress throughout.

About the ALLIANCE. The ALLIANCE is the national third sector membership organisation for the health and social care sector. Our 3,500+ individual and organisational members are essential in creating a society in which we all can thrive.

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