British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2023-2029

Analysis of consultation responses

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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About the authors

alma economics

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Executive Summary

The Scottish Government launched a written consultation between 7 July 2023 and 3 September 2023, seeking stakeholders' views on the draft British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2023-2029. Alma Economics was commissioned by the Scottish Government to analyse the responses to that consultation. This report provides an independent summary and, as such, does not represent the Scottish Government's response.

The consultation asked a total of 31 questions, including 14 closed questions (e.g., receiving yes/ no/ don't know responses, respondent type) and 17 open-text questions (receiving free text responses). Questions addressed the BSL National Plan 2023-2029's key priorities and gathered views on the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 as a whole, as well as the government-funded Contact Scotland BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service.

Responses to the consultation were accepted through five formats, including (i) the Citizen Space online platform, (ii) email (including PDF attachments), (iii) post (hard copy responses would be scanned as PDFs), (iv) social media comments or tweets received in the Scottish Government media channels, and (v) by participating in a consultation community engagement event or focus group (outputs from these events are captured in four reports that inform this consultation analysis report), and submitting a response in BSL.

A total of 80 responses were received, 76 of which were submitted through Citizen Space and 4 were sent via email. A total of 43 community consultation events were held in addition to the consultation to allow BSL users to participate in a two-way dialogue in their own language and in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way to express their views. The community consultation events organised by stakeholders took place between 30 June 2023 and 3 September 2023.

Respondents included individuals, local councils, academic institutions, public body representatives (including executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), National Health Service (NHS), etc.), third sector service delivery organisations, and organisations representing the deaf, deafblind, and BSL communities.

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the closed-format questions, and thematic analysis was used to synthesise themes raised in the open-text questions and community consultation events' reports. After themes were identified for each open-text question, 5 overarching themes, those most frequently appearing among open-text questions, were identified and outlined below. The overarching themes were raised by both individual and organisation respondents, as well as by BSL and non-BSL users.

Focus on clear, tangible, and measurable actions

Several respondents discussed the need for more clear, tangible, and measurable actions to be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. This was frequently expressed across consultation responses and community events. Respondents wanted to see more detailed and clearly articulated actions for each key priority,

described in plain English to maximise reader accessibility. They also highlighted the need for clarification on how each action will be measured and monitored, as well as who will be accountable for its implementation. A large minority believed that the previous BSL National Plan 2017-2023 had not sufficiently enacted all its stated actions, and sought increased efforts to implement these rather than conducting further research, such as another consultation. Ultimately, respondents were interested in a BSL National Plan 2023-2029 which will explicitly commit the Scottish Government to delivering on its promises.

Continuous collaboration with BSL users

Cutting across several themes and questions, respondents emphasised the importance of collaborating with the BSL community throughout the development and implementation of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Partnership and ongoing consultation with BSL representatives were expressed as a requirement to ensure that actions remain meaningful, beneficial, and relevant to all those involved. Respondents were wary of tokenistic or 'tick-box' actions, urging the Scottish Government to engage in continuous dialogue with the community, create opportunities for feedback over the duration of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, and actively seek diverse opinions from various stakeholders (most notably the BSL community).

Equal opportunity and inclusion

For all respondents, ensuring equal access, opportunity, representation, and inclusion for all BSL users was understood as a fundamental right of Scottish citizens. Access to essential services, including healthcare, social care, mental health services, and transport, were considered most urgent by respondents. State-funded, high-quality BSL education was also a priority across all responses, particularly for BSL users and their families from the point of need. A large minority of respondents also highlighted that access should be extended to include culture, heritage, and the arts (such as sports, theatre, and the news), which, though instrumental in cultivating positive mental health, were typically considered lower priorities for the community within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 and therefore not the primary focus of accessibility initiatives. The freedom to choose and make informed decisions about their communication preferences and access to public life was considered a key measure of equality.

Promote BSL as a language and culture

The promotion of BSL as both a language and a rich culture was important to respondents across all consultation responses and community events. Though support for increased language acquisition opportunities throughout Scotland was unanimous, respondents did not want BSL to be reduced to language alone. BSL users described their rich, vibrant, and unique culture, which they believed should be shared amongst the wider population. The benefits of this holistic approach were understood in two complementary ways: first, it promotes a greater understanding about the BSL community as a whole, positively impacting accessibility, inclusion, and awareness across public life, and second, visible celebration of BSL culture (including arts, historical figures, heritage, etc.) is a key source of pride and empowerment for the community, strengthening their sense of identity, inclusion, and belonging.

Inclusion of the whole D/deaf community

Embedded within multiple consultation responses was the concern that certain groups within the wider D/deaf community would be overlooked by the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Though the BSL National Plan 2023-2029's targeted efforts were welcomed, it was widely recognised that BSL users are only a subset of the entire D/deaf community and that experiences also varied significantly amongst BSL users themselves. Respondents stressed the importance of addressing this through an intersectional approach to understand the diverse experiences and needs within the BSL community. This includes paying particular attention to deafblind BSL users (whose needs and communication preferences vary from deaf BSL users) as well as differences across age, geographical region (including regional signs and dialects), gender, sexual orientation, and other protected characteristics. Any actions delivered as part of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 should accurately reflect these nuances, ensuring that efforts to increase access and awareness benefit everyone equally. A small number of respondents also emphasised that BSL is not universally used as the primary method of communication amongst deaf people, and accessibility efforts should also consider this.

1. Introduction

The [British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015](#) requires the Scottish Ministers and public bodies listed in the Act to publish and consult on a draft of their British Sign Language (BSL) Plan. The Act also specifies that the consultation should involve individuals who are likely to be directly affected by the plan, including BSL users and those who represent them.

The [BSL National Plan 2017-2023](#) has laid a strong foundation for the upcoming BSL National Plan 2023-2029, set to be published by 31 October 2023. The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 will outline a combination of short-, mid- and long-term goals spanning six years, covering six priority areas including: i) BSL Data Strategy; (ii) BSL Workforce; (iii) Supporting Deaf Children, Young People and their Families; (iv) BSL Accessibility; (v) the Promotion of the Heritage and Culture of BSL; and (vi) Social Care and Wellbeing. The draft actions proposed for the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 encompass a set of commitments and measures designed to collectively address these six priority areas.

Recognising the need to fully consider a range of proposed actions, the Scottish Government has sought views on the necessary actions to advance BSL in Scotland over the next six years. Public consultation is a key element of the policymaking process, ensuring that the views, experiences, knowledge, and ideas of the public and experts guide decision-makers in shaping and implementing new policies and regulations.

Throughout the development of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, the Scottish Government has engaged with stakeholders and the public through numerous public engagement activities. The draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029 has been informed by a Short Life Working Group, comprising organisations representing the deaf, deafblind and BSL communities. Between July and September 2023, 43 community consultation events were carried out in addition to the consultation to allow BSL users to participate in a two-way dialogue in their own language and in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way to express their views.

Rigorous independent analysis of responses to consultations is at the core of evidence-based policymaking and will contribute to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn. The aim of the current project was to undertake a transparent, rigorous and systematic analysis of the valid responses to the [BSL National Plan 2023-2029 consultation](#). This report is a balanced and impartial presentation of the analysis, ensuring that the full range and nature of views are presented.

2. Methodology

The consultation opened on 7 July 2023 and closed on 3 September 2023. Response collection was conducted through the online Citizen Space portal. Respondents could submit a response to the consultation via the following means: (i) via the Citizen Space online platform, (ii) email (including PDF attachments), (iii) post (hard copy responses would be scanned as PDFs), (iv) participating in a consultation community engagement event or focus group, and (vi) submitting a response in BSL.

The consultation consisted of 31 questions, divided into two categories: 14 closed questions, which prompted yes/no/don't know responses and required respondents to specify their type (individual or organisation; if an organisation, the organisation type, such as academic/research, Local Government, Public Body, Representative Body for Professionals, Third Sector/Deaf Organisation, Other; and whether they were BSL users, not BSL users, or preferred not to say) and 17 open questions, inviting free text responses.

These questions were structured along the six priority areas :

i) BSL Data Strategy;
ii) BSL Workforce;
iii) Supporting Deaf Children, Young People and their Families;
iv) BSL Accessibility;
v) Promotion of the Heritage and Culture of BSL;
vi) and Social Care and Wellbeing.

Responses also covered overall comments on the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 and Contact Scotland BSL.

A total of 80 responses were received, 76 directly via Citizen Space and 4 separately via email (in some cases including PDF attachments). Additionally, our analysis considered four reports that summarise findings from 43 consultation community events.

Answers were combined into a final Excel file used for subsequent coding. Only email or PDF responses that explicitly addressed consultation questions were added to respective Excel sheets per question. A total of 80 unique submissions answering the consultation questions were reviewed accordingly. A separate analysis sheet was added for email responses that did not directly answer the consultation's questions, as well as for general comments about the consultation contained in email responses and community events reports that also included a consultation response form and were coded separately as "unstructured responses".

All responses were reviewed in full. Before turning to the qualitative analysis of consultation responses, we first analysed the responses to the closed questions, calculating the total counts for each available option within each closed question, as well as the respective percentages in relation to the total number of responses received for each corresponding closed question. We also produced charts and

tables to better present the distribution of responses to each closed question. All charts have Alt Text to enable full accessibility. An appendix for the report provides a comprehensive breakdown including: (i) tables presenting a breakdown of the total number of respondents to the consultation by respondent type (individual or organisation, whether the respondent is a BSL user or not, if an organisation the type of organisation, and for organisations that selected 'other' as organisation type, a description of their organisation), (ii) tables presenting the percentages of responses to the closed questions, (iii) tables presenting a breakdown of responses to the closed questions by respondent type (individual or organisation), (iv) tables presenting a breakdown of responses to the closed question by whether they are a BSL user or not.

Free text questions were categorised using a thematic analysis whereby responses were assigned key themes and coded accordingly. This qualitative research method (Braun and Clarke 2006) involved manually reviewing each response to identify common themes; connecting these themes to specific questions of the consultation to develop a narrative for each theme; cross-referencing the emerging themes to ensure the accuracy of the analysis; identifying responses that did not align with the general emerging themes but provided additional insights. These insights were included in the analysis, even though they were not raised by many respondents.

Additionally, we conducted thematic analysis of the reports from the 43 community events, identifying themes related to each question of the consultation document. Following this process, we complemented our initial thematic analysis findings with additional themes that were emerging from the discussion in community events. In case community events reports highlighted themes that were not covered in the online consultation responses, we updated our report with the new themes to ensure all consultation respondents were considered in full.

This report lists the number of responses to each question at the beginning of each section. The main body of this report follows the consultation's question order, and themes for each free text question are presented in order of frequency (descending by the number of respondents mentioning the respective theme).

While the analysis of free text questions is qualitative and cannot be quantified, a general rule of thumb was applied to indicate the frequency of emerging themes using specific phrases, which could provide an estimate of the number of respondents discussing each respective theme. In particular:

- "a small number" indicated up to 5 respondents.
- "a few" indicated around 6-9 respondents.
- "a small minority" indicated more than 9 respondents but less than 10%.
- "a significant minority" indicated between approximately 10-24% of respondents.
- "a large minority" indicated more than a quarter of respondents but less than half.
- "a majority" indicated more than 50% of those who commented on the question.

Respondents were self-selecting and may not represent wider public opinion across Scotland. Where appropriate, individual quotes have been used to illustrate the narrative around specific themes, with quotes selected only from respondents who provided permission for their views to be published and with any potential identifiers (such as the name of a specific organisation) removed. Typos in selected quotes have been corrected to ensure uninterrupted readability of shared views.

Respondent characteristics

A total of 80 respondents participated in this consultation, with 48 (60%) being individual respondents and 32 (40%) representing organisations.
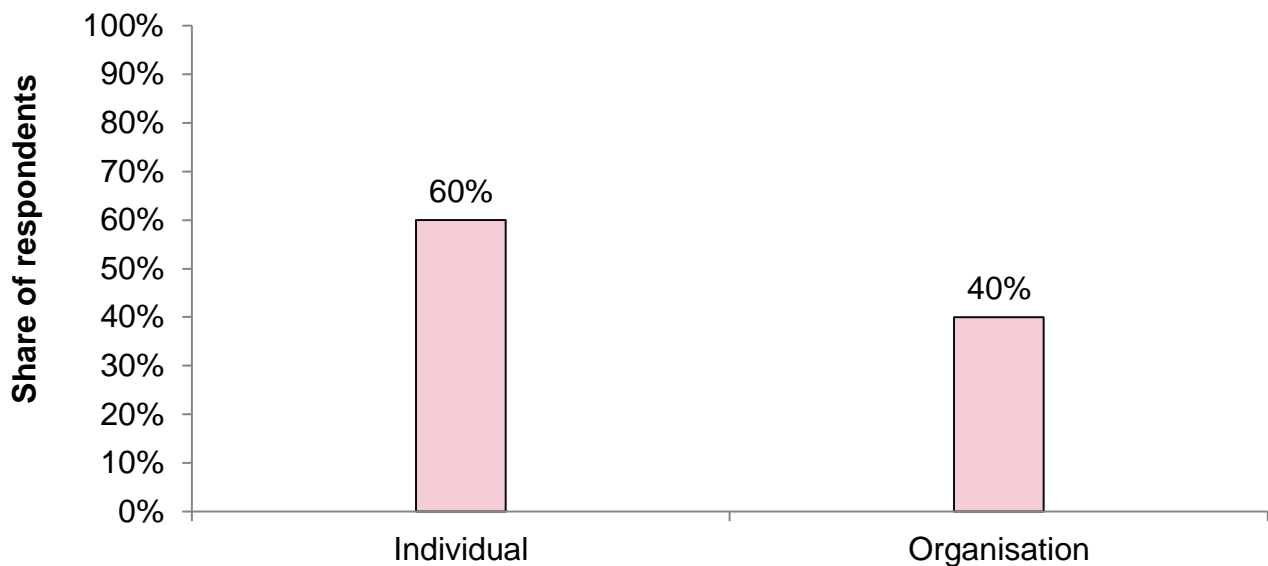
Among the respondents to the consultation, 36% were BSL users, 50% were not BSL users, and 14% of respondents preferred not to say whether they were BSL users or not.
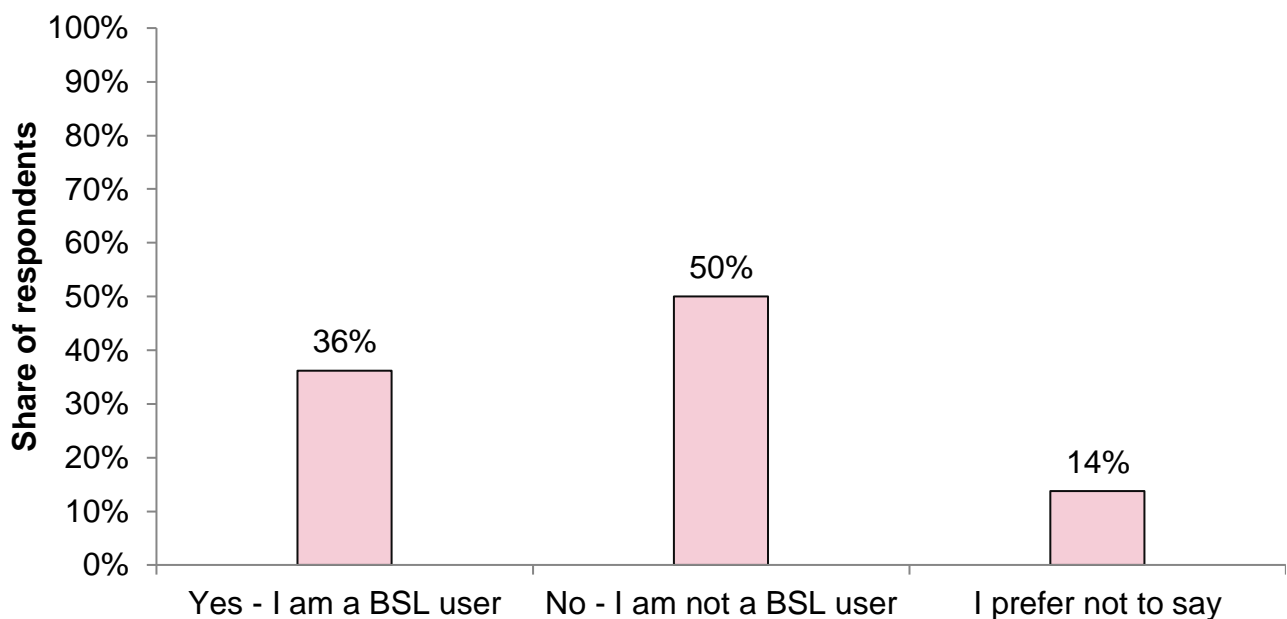
3. Views on the six priorities within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029

This section of the consultation gathered views on the six key priorities within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029, presented in the following order: (i) Data on BSL, (ii) BSL Workforce, (iii) Supporting deaf children, young people and their families, (iv) BSL accessibility, (v) Promotion of the heritage and culture of BSL, and (vi) Social care and wellbeing.

For each key priority, respondents were asked whether it should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, as well as the reasons for their response. Summaries of these consultation responses for the six key priorities are presented below.

BSL Data Strategy

Introduction

The Scottish Government acknowledges the need for a sustainable approach to obtaining data and evidence regarding BSL to support the actions within current and future BSL National Plans.

The consultation set out the following draft actions:

1. "To explore how a BSL Data Strategy for Scotland would work in practice, including establishing how we will gather data and evidence and distribute this in a way which helps develop sustainable approaches in data gathering around BSL."

Question 1.1.a - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 76 responses to this question.
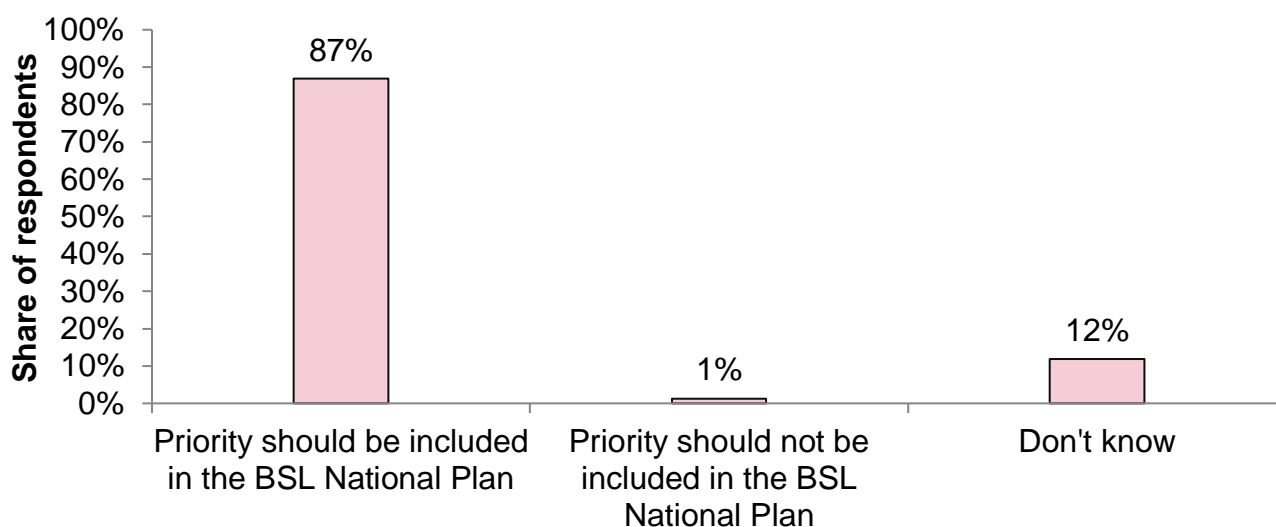
The majority of respondents (87%) supported the inclusion of Data on BSL as a key priority in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Only 1% of respondents were of the opinion that Data on BSL should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Finally, 12% of respondents answered "Don't know".

Question 1.1.a - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 61 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Importance of data to plan services

The most common theme among respondents to this question was the emphasis on the importance of collecting data to accurately identify the extent of need, and support the planning and development of evidence-based services. Policy areas mentioned by respondents where more data could drive improvement of services included education and healthcare provision. For example, BSL education policy could be informed by collecting data that would deepen the Scottish Government's understanding of the educational attainment of deaf BSL pupils, whether they are placed in schools with sufficient BSL tutors, as well as longer-term data such as labour market outcomes of BSL users. Additionally, regarding health, a small number of respondents noted that collecting more data on topics such as the number of Deaf people and children, as well as the extent of gaps in provision for currently underserved groups, such as deafblind people, could help drive improvement in equality of access in health and mental health provision.

A significant minority of respondents emphasised that data collection is also key for monitoring progress and understanding improvement both in relation to actions in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, but also services aimed at the BSL community more widely. Furthermore, respondents in this theme often felt that there is currently a lack of data on BSL users and the deaf and hard of hearing communities or that existing data collection is limited. A few respondents offered specific suggestions on the type of data that should be collected, including (i) the number of BSL users, (ii) the number of people in the wider deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing communities, and (iii) data relating to the particular needs and shortages in provision for deafblind people. Additionally, a small number of respondents suggested that data collected should be able to be disaggregated by the type of hearing loss (e.g. deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing), and by demographic and protected characteristics to ensure intersectionality is considered. Finally, a small number of respondents emphasised the importance of collecting qualitative data for a more comprehensive understanding.

> "Without accurate data on this population group, we will be unable to fully understand the scale of issues experienced by the community and plan accordingly." (Organisation)

> "Ensuring accuracy and consistency of data on BSL is an essential element of improving provision for BSL users across Scotland but at present there is a severe lack of evidence-based research data to inform policy decisions." (Organisation)

Data governance

The next most prevalent theme concerned specific recommendations relating to the collection and governance of data collected as part of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Many respondents in this theme agreed with the imperative of developing a sustainable data collection model to underpin the BSL National Strategy. These respondents also argued that the data collection approach would have to be consistent nationally, ensuring similar data are collected across Scotland. Furthermore, a few respondents highlighted the importance of fostering policy co-creation, engaging with the BSL, hard of hearing and deaf community, and other relevant stakeholders to consult them on the data collection process and future decision-making on developing services.

A few respondents also suggested that the Scottish Government should be mindful of the potential administrative and data burden of the future BSL Data Strategy so that data collection requirements do not overburden service staff. To that end, improving existing reporting mechanisms, as well as leveraging and building on existing BSL data collection efforts, rather than designing new ones, was seen by some respondents as a solution to mitigating the risk of overburdening local authorities and other public sector bodies. Organisations that took part in the consultation often discussed particular approaches to data governance and came up with specific recommendations that depended on the respondent organisation's particular sector of expertise (academic, third sector, local authority). Recommendations included: connecting health and social care records and adding information on a preferred mode of communicating; enhancements to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data collection requirements; wider sharing of screening data such as the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS), as well as screening for Usher's Syndrome, and deafblindness later in life, to allow comparisons nationally and more widely with the rest of the UK to help identify issues through studying screening patterns; standardising acquisition of the Local Records of Deaf Children; expanding the Scottish Government's and public services' data collection on BSL users beyond the Census, by ensuring existing data collections also collect data on BSL users (e.g., fostering closer collaboration between the Scottish Government and the Office for National Statistics to achieve the collection of data on BSL users UK-wide through existing national data collections such as the Labour Force Survey).

> "Any model of evidence gathering and data collection must enable organisations to provide data in ways that are realistic and proportionate within their own context and consider how organisations can provide BSL data within existing reporting processes and requirements, rather than requiring a separate process" (Organisation)

> "Improved, meaningful and reliable data is fundamental to an improved understanding of the needs of those who use BSL and consideration of how these can continue to be met. Development of a data strategy is to be welcomed, should recognise data already routinely collected and should include participation of key agencies/ bodies representing BSL users or holding data. It would be helpful to have a clearer indication of the implications and requirements for Local

authorities and ensure that data gathered is relevant and proportionate." (Organisation)

Addressing social inclusion and unmet needs

The third most mentioned theme indicated the significance of social inclusion of the D/deaf community, emphasising their equal rights as citizens and contribution to society. Respondents in this theme supported taking steps to collect sufficient data to highlight gaps in provision and lead to improvement in social inclusion and equal opportunities for the D/deaf and BSL communities. To that end, a small number of respondents mentioned the importance of collecting data for all people with some type of hearing loss and ensuring that data is inclusive of intersectionality, considering the diverse experiences of people with different intersecting characteristics. Respondents in this theme often emphasised that the D/deaf and BSL communities currently have significant unmet needs. The most common issue brought forward by those respondents was a significant shortage of interpreters, including tactile BSL interpreters. It was mentioned that better data collection could help target policies to address the areas of greatest unmet need for the D/deaf and BSL communities.

"Yes, it's important to gather the data so plans can be made in the context of the people whose lives it's meant to improve. I'm deafened and I do not use BSL […]. See Hear strategy should not ever lose sight of the wider context and the parallel needs of people with hearing loss - we may not require the same communication strategies […], but the aims are the same, surely - to have an inclusive society which gives equality of access to all." (Individual)

"Data gathering is transformative when it is applied to progress human rights and social justice. For this reason, it is crucial that BSL data includes disaggregated data to reveal inequalities which may be concealed within aggregated data." (Organisation)

"Anecdotal evidence of interpreters regularly 'not turning up', for example, in healthcare settings, is prevalent - however, this will continue to be solely anecdotal until measures are established to find out where in the 'booking chain' the arrangements have fallen down. A data strategy could be immensely helpful in identifying gaps and weaknesses in processes, and then we can take genuine practical steps to address the BSL community's concerns rather than offer the 'shoulder shrug' we have so often been given in the past." (Organisation)

The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 needs to be more detailed

The next most common theme was responses in which respondents argued that the current draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029's suggestions relating to the BSL Data priority are too broad. Respondents in this theme stressed that the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 should be more detailed, setting out specific steps linked to delivering the BSL Data Strategy. Respondents in this theme often felt that the language in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 did not commit the Scottish Government to specific actions. It was felt that instead of setting out what will be "explored", the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 should set out what will be delivered and include details on what data will be collected and how.

"The action relating to data needs to be more specific. Rather than 'explore' what to do, it would be more helpful for the action to be: 13. Establish a BSL Data Strategy for Scotland by 2027, which sets out sustainable approaches and best practice in data gathering and use around BSL." (Organisation)

"Not enough details to agree/disagree – nothing about how to gather data. How to interview everybody? Why? What's the purpose?" (Community Event)

Issues around consultation language, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and funding

A small number of respondents discussed other themes, such as inappropriate communication with the Deaf community throughout the consultation (government jargon and terminology, which was not translated into a form of BSL) and overall flaws in public sector services (absence of feedback forms in BSL).

An additional theme raised during community events related to upholding the GDPR when engaging with Deaf communities, and ensuring Deaf individuals are protected. A small number of people pointed out that data sharing should be a two-way process: councils should provide information to deaf clubs,[1] and vice versa. Otherwise, there is a risk that deaf/ deafblind people will be isolated and beyond the reach of social care services. On the other hand, mechanisms must be implemented to protect sensitive data.

A small number of people who participated in community events wanted the Scottish Government to ensure that funding goes to the Deaf community rather than hearing people who train to be BSL teachers. Furthermore, a small number of community events' participants noted that the data collected for the Scotland Census may be misleading as it did not differentiate between deaf and hearing people who know BSL.

'I attended an event delivered by the [organisation name]. The information provided was not clear, not only for me, but for all participants. Information was delivered using the government's jargon and terminology, which was not translated into a form of BSL that would allow the Deaf Community to understand what was being said or asked. PowerPoints appeared to be lifted straight from the 'hearing' information, presented in a written English format that was not understood.' (Individual)

'Building up a national database about the Deaf community needs to be a two-way process. We will supply the SG with data, and we expect them to supply Deaf clubs or groups with data too. For example, Deaf clubs need information to make sure older Deaf people are not lonely and isolated at home. My social worker refused to share someone's address, and this Deaf person died alone.' (Community Event)

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[1] 'Deaf Clubs' is a term commonly used by community consultation events participants to describe places where deaf people use BSL. Further guidance on the meaning of 'Deaf Clubs'

'Useful to know where the funding goes to Deaf people, not just hearing people, for example, for training BSL teachers and for Train the Trainers (ToTs) courses?' (Community Event)

BSL Workforce

Introduction

The Scottish Government acknowledges the ongoing issues regarding shortages in BSL professions in Scotland, including BSL/English interpreting and BSL tutors. This key priority aims to increase the number of BSL professionals to help address shortages in these fields and improve access to BSL services for the deaf communities in Scotland.

The consultation set out the following draft actions:

1. "Investigate opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, support available to them, and skills development, including how to work with BSL/English interpreters."

2. "Work with Social Security Scotland to ensure that BSL users continue to provide input into their services in a way that is accessible to them."

3. "To explore how a BSL Workforce Strategy alongside a BSL Data Strategy, will consider pathways including, and not limited to, BSL/English interpreting and BSL tutors/teachers."

Question 1.1.b – What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 75 responses to this question.
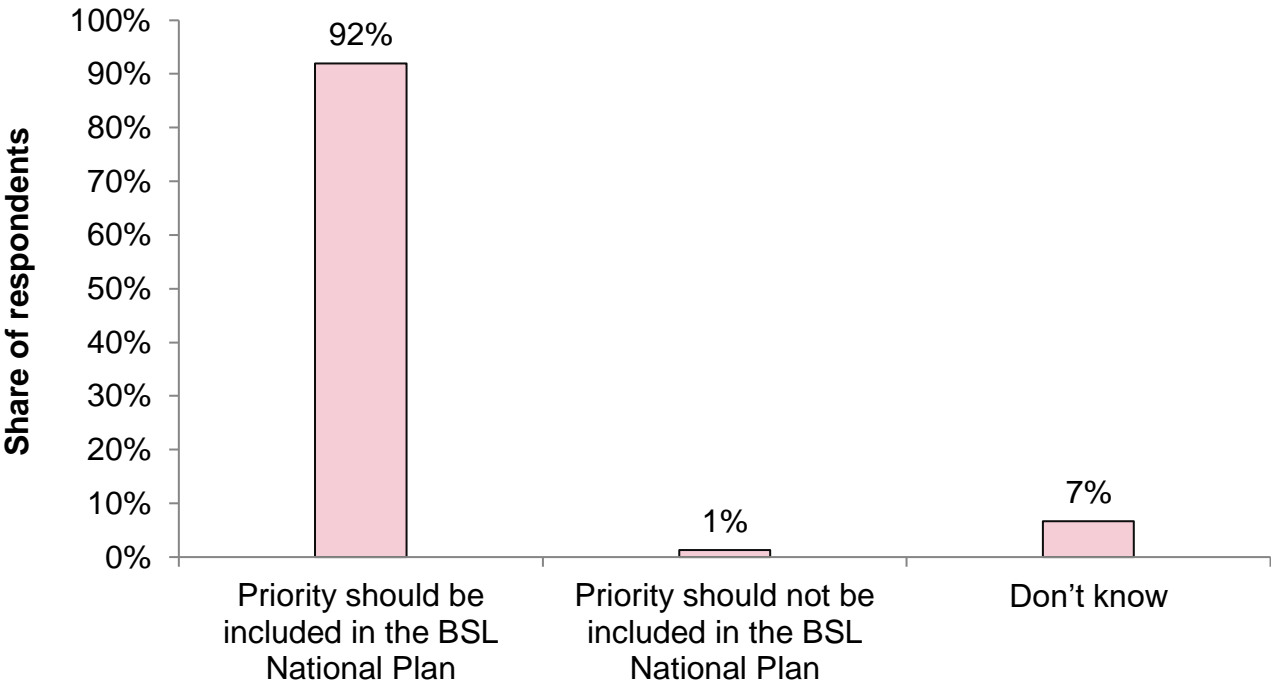
The overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) agreed that the BSL Workforce should be included as a key priority within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. A very small proportion of respondents (1%) were against including the BSL Workforce as a key priority in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Finally, 7% of respondents expressed no preference ("Don't know").

Question 1.1.b - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 60 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Increasing the number of BSL professionals

By far, the most frequent theme was concerns around shortages of BSL professionals in Scotland, including BSL/ English interpreters, BSL tutors, and Guide Communicators. Addressing this shortage was an urgent priority for respondents, considering its significant impact on accessibility to public services (such as healthcare, social services, or the justice system), education and employment, participation in democratic processes, and the ability to make informed decisions. Although shortages of BSL professionals were described as an issue across Scotland, a small number of respondents highlighted that this was significantly worse in rural areas.

The four most common suggestions given to address this were: (i) streamlining pathways to becoming a registered BSL professional for both deaf and hearing people, (ii) encouraging native BSL users to become BSL professionals, (iii) better accessibility and affordability of BSL qualifications, including more in-person options and free or low-cost qualifications, and (iv) improving career prospects for BSL professionals to make it a valued and viable option for more people.

One important consideration raised across responses was ensuring that any efforts to expand the BSL professional workforce in Scotland were combined with efforts to raise the quality of the workforce (such as through enhanced training). Concerns were expressed about the quality of existing training at advanced qualification levels, with reference to the significant negative consequences low-quality interpretation has on BSL users' ability to access essential services.

> "Lack of BSL Interpreters in Scotland is an enormous issue that is impacting this community in all aspects of their life, from schooling to health care. Even within the healthcare service, the lack of BSL interpreters is causing delays to patient care, communication issues and lack of trust from the community towards the NHS." (Organisation)

> "Priority should be given to increasing the BSL workforce in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, given the reduction in numbers of Teachers of the Deaf in Scotland (research for/by the National Deaf Children's Society shows that the number of Teachers of the Deaf in Scotland has decreased by 40% in the past decade, with 45% of remaining teachers expected to retire over the next 10 years), investment in training is essential to mitigate a shortfall in teaching." (Organisation)

"Some BSL/English interpreters struggled with Department for Work and Pensions/Social Security Scotland (SSS) interviews, leading to some Deaf people losing benefits. Deaf people feel it is necessary for SSS staff to have more BSL awareness" (Community Event)

Supporting BSL users to access the workplace

Increasing actions to support BSL users to access the workplace was identified as the second most common theme. This theme was more common among organisation responses to this question and was raised by almost half of total respondents. Respondents discussed targeted employability measures that support deaf young people to transition into employment, including paid work experience, apprenticeships, training programmes, qualifications, and volunteering opportunities. Employability initiatives which targeted essential services (such as healthcare) were particularly popular across responses to reduce BSL users' reliance on BSL/ English interpreters within these services. A small number of respondents also suggested that these opportunities should take an intersectional approach and prioritise access to those from under-represented groups within the deaf community.

A small number of respondents were interested in seeing additional actions targeting older BSL users who may face different challenges in the workplace to younger BSL users, such as re-entering the workforce after redundancy, illness, or periods of unemployment. Suggestions included providing opportunities for upskilling or reskilling and targeted support to navigate career transitions.

In addition to individual support, a few respondents discussed introducing measures which target organisations directly. There were concerns that organisations were not sufficiently promoting Access to Work measures, such as grants to pay for practical or communication support at work, negatively affecting BSL users' ability to access the workplace. One Community Event respondent reported that big organisations "can't be bothered" with the additional administrative costs. Encouraging and monitoring the appropriate use of Access to Work was supported, as well as actions which cover employment within the private sector.

"There is a need to raise awareness and support for employability projects which provide waged work experience, support, and training to disabled people who wish to enter employment, education, or volunteering." (Organisation)

"Investigate opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, support available to them, and skills development, including how to work with BSL/English interpreters." (Organisation)

"[…] it should apply to every Deaf/Deafblind person irrespective of their age. There seems to be a lot of focus on young people, but not enough on older people who may have lost work through redundancy or ill health and who are having to transition and navigate a very different job market than they had in the past.' (Community Event)

Additional measures to support BSL users within the workplace

The third theme discussed additional measures to support BSL users to thrive within the workplace; respondents felt that the key priority should broaden its focus to also address the challenge of retaining a job and developing a career. Although these measures should target all BSL users, this was considered particularly important for those who experience progressive hearing and/ or sight loss whilst in employment. This theme was more frequently raised by organisation respondents than by individual respondents.

It was felt that responsibility was placed more heavily on employees than employers, and a small number of participants called for workplaces to cater to all employees without having to request reasonable adjustments. Health and safety regulations were also listed during community events as factors impeding the employment of deaf people, especially since some organisations do not comply with Access to Work due to additional administrative burdens. Ensuring that any measures introduced in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 to increase accessibility within the workplace were both mandatory and enforceable was particularly important to respondents.

> " […] it was one challenge to secure a job and another to retain one and that there should be support in place for sensory loss transitions whilst in work. Most participants have progressive sight and/or hearing loss, and there were many examples of bad practice in workplaces where people had felt 'hounded' or 'pushed' out of work. This feedback ranged across a number of professions with examples given from teachers, a nursery nurse and a couple of participants from working in retail." (Community Event)

> "Health & safety is the biggest barrier, preventing Deaf people from getting jobs because employers view Deaf people as expensive, high risk, high insurance. It means Deaf people are seen as inferior." (Community Event)

> "Many deafblind people are at retirement age by the time of onset, but for the minority who are not, the transition into deafblindness whilst in the workplace can be overwhelming with few feeling that they had access to adequate support […] This is an area where further actions could be considering including support to retain employment as for deafblind people this can be a central challenge as their hearing loss or sight loss progression often occurs in the second part of their employment years." (Organisation)

Clarifying the implementation and delivery of this key priority

The final most frequent theme focused on the implementation and delivery of this key priority (BSL Workforce). The most frequent request by respondents was for more financial commitments by the Scottish Government within the Priority. This included the provision of sufficient funding to enable the successful delivery of any action.

Additional recommendations included clearer actions and measurable outcomes related to the key priority, as well as additional commitments to monitor and enforce

the delivery of actions. A few respondents also supported more targeted guidance and support to employers (such as on the Access to Work scheme) to ensure that any efforts to increase BSL users' access to the workforce would be adequately catered for.

> "Consideration of funding and availability of training establishments across Scotland would be beneficial to ensure accessibility. There is a risk that people are trained as interpreters and tutors and there are no employment opportunities locally. Funding from the Scottish Government for 1+2 languages has ceased this year. Increasing the numbers of trained people in the workforce will require investment." (Organisation)

> "Although it is positive that the Scottish Government is open to investigating opportunities to improve the transition into the workplace, we hoped that more prescriptive actions would have been included for us to give feedback on." (Organisation)

Supporting Deaf Children, Young People and their Families

Introduction

The Scottish Government acknowledges the impact of language deprivation on deaf and deafblind children's crucial developmental learning between the ages of 0 and 5 years, which can negatively affect their social, cognitive, and emotional development.

The consultation set out the following draft actions:

1. "The Scottish Government will investigate and explore an early intervention model for sign language acquisition for deaf and deafblind new-borns and children to ensure they and their families have access to both BSL and English. This will assess existing models to determine if we can build or improve on them. This action will help to ensure that deaf and deafblind babies and children are able to grow and thrive in an environment using the language of their choice."

2. "Investigate the provisions of support for deaf and deafblind children within Scotland, and identify any gaps in support to inform an immediate remedial action plan. This includes BSL tuition for deaf and deafblind children and their families."

3. "To investigate opportunities for early years workers to learn BSL up to the level of SCQF Level 6 to inform our future work in this area."

4. "Support the development of opportunities for deaf and deafblind children, young people, and their families, to learn about the heritage and culture of BSL, especially in Scotland."

5. "To establish a BSL Education Advisory Group to inform priorities around access to BSL and teaching of BSL, with initial focus on deaf and deafblind children."

6. "To work with the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) to explore and facilitate pathways for BSL users to obtain Qualified Teacher Status."

7. "To investigate opportunities for Teachers of the Deaf and teachers working with deaf and deafblind children in obtaining qualifications for BSL up to SCQF Level 10."

Question 1.1.c – What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 76 responses to this question.
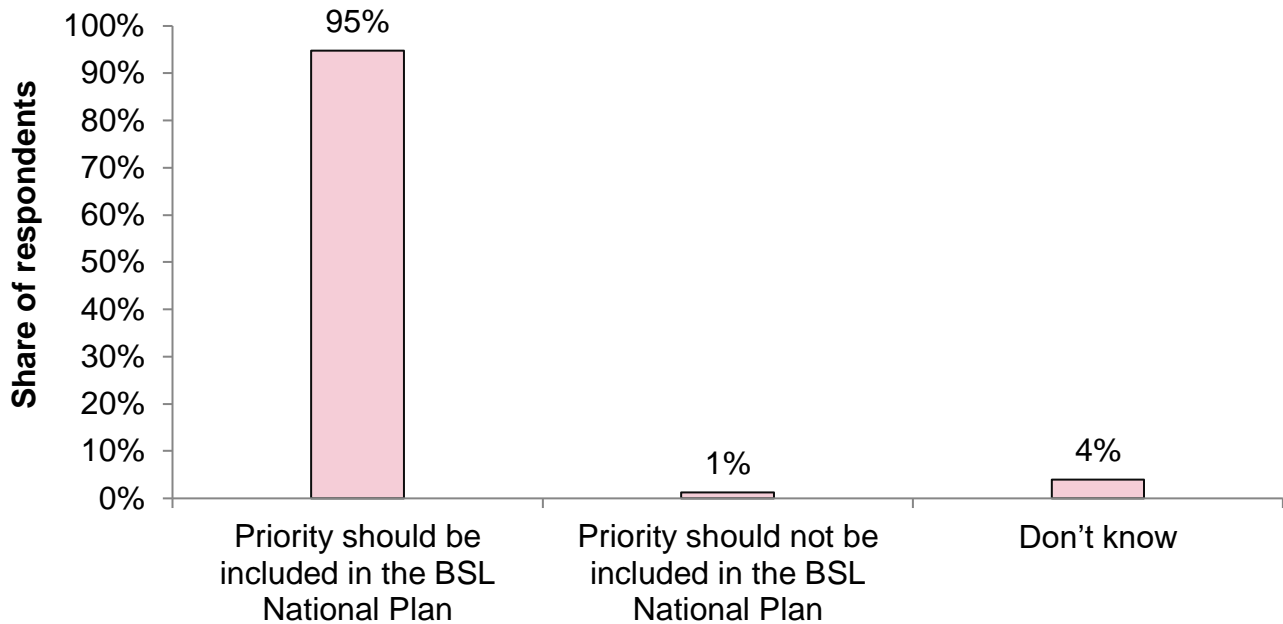
Most respondents to this question (95%) answered that Deaf children, young people and families should be included as a key priority in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. The opposite view was held by a small minority of respondents (1%). Finally, a further 4% answered "Don't know".

Question 1.1.c - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 59 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Importance of early intervention

The most common theme highlighted the importance of early intervention for deaf children and their families. Respondents described this as a particularly significant time for two distinct areas of child development: (i) cognitive development related to language acquisition and communication skills, and (ii) emotional development, particularly linked to social interaction and integration, the development of a secure identity, and overall wellbeing. Failing to successfully deliver this was considered to have lifelong impacts on deaf children's educational attainment, employment prospects, and mental health.

A significant minority of respondents also called for more detailed actions, clearer timeframes, and measurable outcomes addressing early intervention within this key priority. This theme was particularly common among organisation respondents.

"[…] early intervention during the crucial 0-5 years can significantly enhance their overall development across social, cognitive, and emotional domains." (Organisation)

"It isn't good enough to 'explore' or 'investigate' options and information. There need to be firm action points which will be delivered. This is such a key area, and investment in the early years is an investment in a child's entire future and their health and wellbeing." (Individual)

Providing immediate access to BSL tuition

Access to free and immediate BSL tuition was identified as the next most frequent theme among respondents. The damaging short- and long-term effects of language deprivation were discussed at length by respondents, with a few describing the increased risks of social isolation and loneliness experienced by deaf children, young people, and their families as a result. Language acquisition was also understood as a key determinant of future educational attainment, employment prospects, and mental health outcomes for deaf children. Given this, respondents stressed that free and immediate access to information on both bilingualism and BSL language learning opportunities for all deaf children, young people, and their families was a fundamental right for all who needed it.

Though there was widespread consensus that all children, young people, and their families should have priority access to BSL tuition, a small number of respondents also supported an increase in BSL tuition for support staff (such as early years or healthcare workers) to ensure they are able to provide adequate support to BSL users.

Suggestions for the delivery of BSL tuition included group classes and 1-1 support, as well as specialist provision integrated within schools, colleges, and higher education. There was a preference amongst a small number of respondents for deaf instructors who were native language users in these settings, as opposed to relying on BSL/ English interpreters.

"Too often, the hearing families of deaf children are left to struggle to find the finances to learn BSL. How can this be right on a human rights basis in 2023? The families of deaf children - parents, sibling, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins should be able to access free BSL classes to enable their deaf child to have the best start in life. In every class where there is a deaf child, all pupils should be taught to sign to ensure that the deaf child has a peer group that can communicate with them." (Individual)

"BSL tuition for families with deaf children needs to be funded and actioned, not just "explored". Where do new parents go? There may be some charities doing this work, but not enough. Parents of a newly diagnosed deaf child are mostly hearing and have no access to learn BSL. These parents, wanting the best for

their child, are often persuaded to have medical procedures like cochlear implants. There needs to be information about BSL and bilingualism, and clear information about where and when they can learn BSL without incurring fees or judgement." (Individual)

Delivering holistic support for families

The next most common theme supported the provision of holistic support for families of deaf children and young people. This theme was more common among respondents who are BSL users. Amongst respondents who discussed this theme, there was consensus that medical advice was not sufficient for most families and that this should extend to emotional support and social integration. Suggestions to address this included greater access to BSL history, culture, and role models, as well as signposting community or peer support groups.

Regarding medical support specifically, a small number of respondents expressed concerns about families not being told the full range of support measures and communication methods available for their children, and reported examples of medical professionals advising against signing for children as it may impede the development of spoken language. This was considered particularly problematic for children with hearing parents who have little or no experience with deafness and BSL. Consequently, respondents emphasised the importance of placing suitably qualified professionals with comprehensive knowledge of both audiological interventions and BSL within essential services.

It was also recognised that any support provided should be tailored to the specific needs of the individual and their family. Specific examples included differences in needs between young children and young adults, as well as differences in need according to the severity of hearing loss (in which case BSL may not always be the most appropriate recommendation). Support, which accounts for each family's diverse characteristics, through the adoption of an intersectional approach, was considered particularly important to empower parents and carers to provide children with the best support.

"You're talking about profoundly or very severely Deaf children here, who should indeed be offered the opportunity to learn BSL, as should their parents if they're hearing parents, or deaf non-BSL using parents […] access to learning BSL will not be the only way forward for a baby who has a mild hearing loss for example. The communication needs will not be the same. Signposting for parents of babies with some hearing loss should be appropriate to those needs, not some blanket BSL solution." (Individual)

"The vast majority of deaf babies are born to hearing parents with little or no experience of deafness. It is crucial that families are given support by suitably trained and skilled professionals (in health, education, social work) and those in the third sector to allow them to access services, understand the importance of audiological interventions and equipment, support their child to develop their language and communication skills in the critical period when the brain is most adaptable and to have appropriate emotional support." (Organisation)

"Information about these options should be presented to families in their own terms, taking into account their cultural and social background in such a way that enhances a family's ability to make informed decisions which meet the needs of their child." (Organisation)

Extending support beyond early years

The final theme related to extending support beyond early years. Although the importance of early identification (specifically, under age 5) and the provision of immediate support for young children and their families was emphasised across responses, as discussed above, a small minority of respondents recognised that this was not sufficient. Deaf young people are faced with new challenges which must be reflected in the support available. In particular, a few respondents were concerned about social exclusion and isolation experienced at school, and supported measures that would continue at least until 18 years of age. Transitions were considered particularly pivotal moments for young people, such as moving on to college, higher education, or employment, and respondents were supportive of introducing targeted actions to support young people through these stages.

One consideration raised across responses was that the quality of BSL tuition provided should increase appropriately with age, ensuring that young people are taught by high-quality professionals who can provide them with the skills for more complex communication.

"Why is "support for deaf children and their families learning BSL in the early years" restricted to the early years? These children do not stop becoming Deaf when they have left the early years, and their families do not need to stop learning BSL at a level that is appropriate to address their increasingly complex needs. This support should continue at least until these children are young adults." (Community Event)

"Deaf young people who use BSL as their preferred method of communication require high quality of fluency of support which, given the lack of qualification framework for specialist and support staff, is not always available. Ensuring Teachers of Deaf (ToDs) and clinical social workers (CSWs) in schools and colleges have a minimum level of BSL qualification so that they can effectively fulfil this role is fundamental." (Organisation)

"It is also vital that there are adequate transition processes and pathways in place as well as resources so that colleges and universities can be supported to meet the needs of users of BSL at further education (FE), higher education (HE) and degree level." (Organisation)

BSL Accessibility

Introduction

The Scottish Government acknowledges the underrepresentation of the BSL communities across organisations and services in Scotland. This key priority aims to cultivate approaches which effectively and sustainably address the visibility, quality, and widespread availability of BSL accessibility in Scotland.

The consultation set out the following draft actions:

1. "To co-ordinate an effort with listed authorities and BSL/deaf communities within the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 to establish sustainable approaches in the development and implementation of their BSL plans, ensuring that cost-effective work is taking place proportionately within their authorities to help their BSL plans target issues more effectively."

2. "To develop a classification framework around British Sign Language, identifying the multiple perspectives including accessibility and as a linguistic minority, and create a guidance in partnership with the See Hear strategy to provide more consistency in approaches to BSL."

3. "The Scottish Government will develop guidance on BSL access for public engagement, including quality assurance of BSL translations."

4. "Review the BSL accessibility of the Scottish Government website, and work with BSL organisations to ensure a high standard of the accessibility of the website."

5. "To consider funding mechanisms for Contact Scotland BSL, and promote the use of these services across the public sector."

6. "To support the uptake of SignPort, an online portal for BSL/English interpreter bookings which will be launched for public use, within the Scottish Government and public bodies."

7. "The Scottish Government will develop an Implementation Working Group for the BSL National Plan, with the aim of regularly reviewing the National Plan's commitments to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the BSL communities in Scotland throughout the lifetime of this Plan."

8. "The BSL Justice Advisory Group will continue to meet, with the aim to regularly review the progress on actions within Justice around BSL and to mainstream BSL into other Justice workstreams."

9. "Explore the provision of BSL meditators/intermediaries, also known as intralingual professionals or advocates, for BSL users going through the justice system to inform work to be taken forward to support this provision."

10. "Support public bodies within the justice sector in exploring ways in which BSL support can be accessed more efficiently for frontline work and emergency response services."

11. "To work with COSLA and the Scottish Parliament to identify existing barriers in support for BSL users within political settings, such as councillor

or MSP, and consider ways in which gaps can be addressed, including learning from the 2022 Access to Elected Office Fund."

12. "Support the facilitation of BSL support in electoral campaigns and the election process to ensure BSL users are able to make informed decisions with access to all relevant information."

Question 1.1.d - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 75 responses to this question.
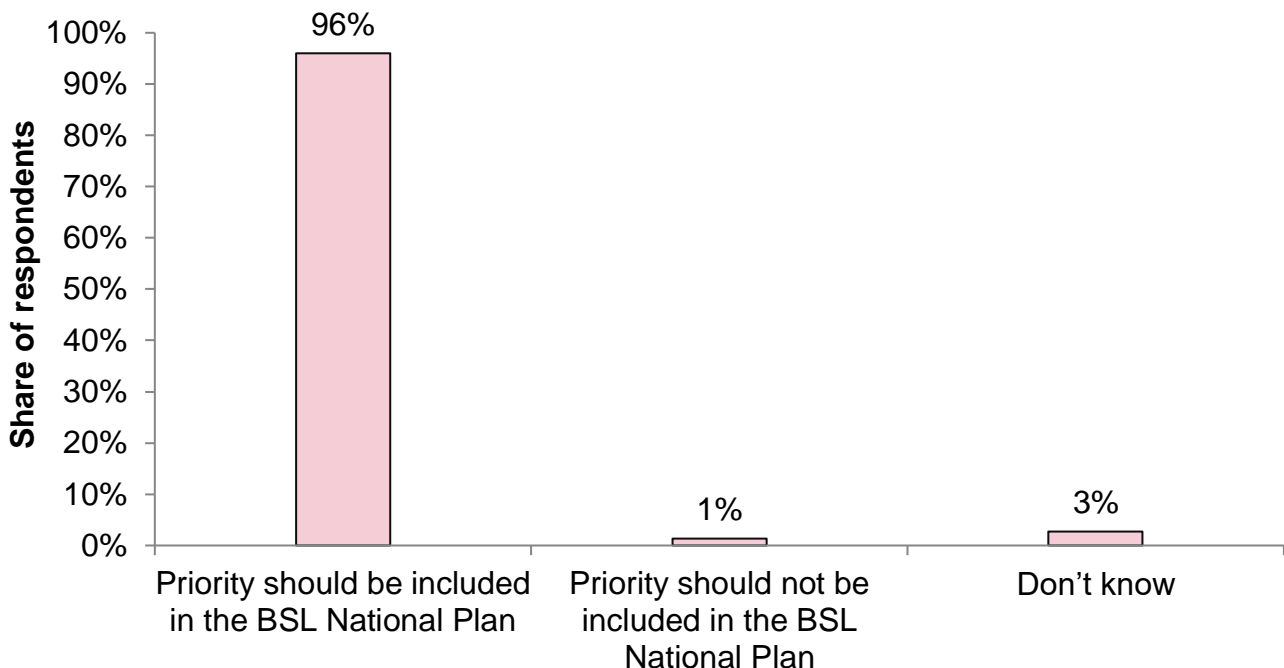
The majority of respondents to this question (96%) expressed the view that BSL accessibility should be included as a key priority in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, compared to 1% of respondents who were against BSL accessibility being included as a priority. Finally, 3% of respondents answered "Don't know".

Question 1.1.d - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 56 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Streamlining strategy and delivery

The most frequent theme expressed concerns about the strategy and delivery of initiatives related to this key priority. This theme was discussed by over half of the respondents to this question, the majority of whom were organisations, and a large minority were not BSL users.

Regarding strategy, respondents wanted consistency and alignment (as opposed to duplication or merging) with existing strategies related to BSL accessibility, such as

the [See Hear strategy](#) and the [previous BSL National Plan 2017-2023](#) . Respondents also wanted more specific and measurable actions in the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029. There was widespread support for a co-design approach with BSL users when deciding these, ensuring all accessibility initiatives are representative of the diverse needs and experiences of the BSL community.

When discussing the delivery of this key priority, a few respondents suggested enforcing BSL accessibility guidelines and BSL translation standards. This would guarantee consistency and high-quality accessibility across Scotland. To support this, respondents called for increased state funding to support participating services and organisations in delivering accessibility initiatives.

> "More detail should be included on what this looks like, or it may be relatively meaningless as an action. BSL users and their advocacy groups should be more involved in the design and development of all accessibility plans to ensure they meet their needs and expectations." (Organisation)

> "All commitments to improve accessibility also need to be backed up with adequate resources and meet the needs of all stakeholders – to include BSL users who need the access, officers who need to ensure access is provided as standard and that the cost of access will not lead to automatic discrimination." (Organisation)

Prioritising essential services

The second most common theme discussed was prioritising BSL accessibility and awareness within specific essential services. The most important areas identified by respondents included healthcare, social care, transport, emergency services (including the justice system and emergency healthcare), and education. Respondents were particularly supportive of mandatory BSL training for all staff within these settings – notably healthcare, emergency services, and education – to guarantee communication at the point of contact without needing to wait for or fund a BSL/ English interpreter.

Besides improved communication support across all these areas, an additional suggestion to enhance accessibility included installing visual screens to display important announcements (such as on public transport or in healthcare waiting rooms).

> "BSL users should be involved in discussions around services providing transport information to ensure that BSL users feel safe using public transport and enjoy the same freedom as other citizens." (Organisation)

> "Ongoing communication with emergency professionals – e.g., in an ambulance or on arrival at a police station or mental health facility – is clearly vital to the wellbeing of all concerned, but there are systemic discontinuities within the framework which still need to be resolved. A commitment to taking appropriate steps within Scottish public services would be a welcome addition to the BSL National Plan 2023-2029." (Organisation)

"Transport such as train stations and airports makes me worried and stressed because I can't hear. A tannoy that has subtitles would be better for me and give independence." (Community Event)

Increasing opportunities for BSL users

The third theme raised by respondents discussed increasing opportunities for BSL users. Besides improving access to further education (FE), higher education (HE) and the Scottish Parliament, access to high-quality employment for BSL users was the most popular priority across responses. Suggestions to achieve this included increasing BSL awareness within the workplace, widening access to supportive equipment and technologies, as well as providing enhanced support to both BSL users and organisations to improve employee retention rates.

"Our local plan would necessarily reflect the historically low numbers of BSL students studying at (organisation), and the challenges of supporting BSL users in our context." (Organisation)

"Poor education is one of the main reasons for the deaf community being underrepresented as they have not had the same level of access to the education required to make an impact in the working community." (Organisation)

Improving assistive technology

Improvements in awareness, training, and availability of assistive technologies were identified as the fourth theme for addressing BSL accessibility. The majority of the respondents who discussed this theme were organisations.

The majority of respondents discussed Contact Scotland BSL and SignPort, and although generally supportive of these services, they identified the need for increased funding to review and improve their offerings. This included efforts for continuous development aligned with ongoing "transformational improvements in accessibility, communication and language inclusion." (Organisation).

More broadly, there was support for an independent digital strategy which targeted uptake by BSL users, digital exclusion (including unaffordable costs and geographical access), and digital literacy (particularly for older BSL users). Relatedly, a small number of respondents called for enhanced digital training to be delivered to both BSL users and service providers or support staff. This would ensure those providing guidance and support to BSL users are informed on what is available as well as how to use these technologies.

"More resources should be put into supporting BSL users to use new technology so that they are at the heart of all digital and technological transformations. Lack of awareness, confidence and even resources can add a barrier to the access BSL users need to get on with their daily life where many services are being provided differently and moving to digital provisions." (Organisation)

"For increased accessibility, we would welcome and support an investment in assistive technologies to easily translate BSL to English and vice versa." (Organisation)

Developing the BSL professional workforce

Next, increasing the quantity and quality of the BSL professional workforce in Scotland was raised as a crucial requirement to successfully deliver this key priority. This theme incorporated multiple recommendations, including: (i) increasing the availability of in-person BSL/English interpreters across Scotland, targeting BSL users who cannot access digital support, (ii) enhancing training to include BSL awareness through an intersectional lens, ensuring the communication workforce is equipped to deal with varied needs and experiences, (iii) enforcing BSL accessibility standards to ensure high-quality, consistent delivery across services and regions, and (iv) developing the communication workforce to beyond BSL (such as lip speakers).

In addition to improving access, developing the BSL professional workforce enables BSL users to choose who they would like to interpret for them. Access to choice was raised as a particularly important point, with specific mention of privacy risks when accessing certain services (such as mental health support).

"A larger pool of BSL/English interpreters is needed throughout Scotland, not just in the Central Belt, to allow the access for Deaf BSL users to be better represented across organisations and services in Scotland. Training for interpreters on these organisations and services will be vital to give them a greater understanding and knowledge on what they do and how Deaf people can contribute." (Organisation)

"Our community shared with us that they can oftentimes feel worried about being judged or misunderstood by an interpreter, especially when discussing issues related to LGBT+ identity, which can be complex and very personal." (Organisation)

"An overarching view was that more lip speakers are needed alongside the need for BSL interpreters and tutors. Tutor for BSL and lip speaking are needed who "must have an awareness of people who have become deafened/deaf" and be aware of the needs of those who have acquired hearing loss and those experiencing the gradual loss of hearing from mild to severe/profound." (Community Event)

Raising awareness and representation of the D/deaf community

The sixth theme supported this key priority as a means of raising awareness of BSL and increasing representation of the BSL community within wider society. The majority of the respondents who discussed this theme were individuals.

As a result of the visibility enabled by greater BSL accessibility, it was widely acknowledged that BSL users would be both more individually independent and socially included. A small number of respondents also noted that any accessibility initiatives should be inclusive of all the D/deaf community beyond BSL users. Specific examples included increased representation (as a result of accessibility) within the news, media, films, and TV shows.

"Please don't forget that not all D/deaf people are BSL users. More and more people are being diagnosed with acquired hearing loss and are living longer.

These people are at a greater risk of isolation and getting dementia than the Deaf community who have their own community." (Individual)

Enabling civic engagement and participation

Finally, respondents were supportive of the key priority as a means of enabling civic engagement and democratic participation by BSL users.

Practically, this was described as guaranteeing access to all important information and decision-making procedures at the local and national levels. A small number of respondents also raised concerns about inaccessibility within voting processes and reliance on Guide Communicators to source key information on political parties or candidates. Televised debates were mentioned as a specific example due to a lack of BSL/ English interpreters visible on screen.

"Work has been done to ensure every other minority in Scotland has been represented in society in Scotland and in public life and politics; it is way past the time when deaf BSL users need to be encouraged and enabled to fully participate in active citizenship and in their geographical, political and social communities." (Individual)

"Public engagement is key for Deaf people to feed into future plans and key developments within their local area which will affect them, so there will need to be sufficient access to interpreting services to allow this to happen." (Organisation)

"Voting was discussed as a time when a language professional is needed to make the process accessible. Some participants had better experiences through the support of Guide Communicators, but overall, most people felt that accessing civic rights was fraught with barriers. Participants talked about how decisions around who to vote for are made following access to information via press, TV, manifesto leaflets, etc. Participants had not experienced formatted versions of these." (Community Event)

The Promotion of the Heritage and Culture of BSL

Introduction

The Scottish Government recognises the vibrant BSL culture in Scotland, as well as the ongoing initiatives in heritage, culture, and the arts that showcase and celebrate BSL. This key priority gathers views on how to expand the sector in ways which will most benefit the BSL community.

The consultation set out the following draft actions:

1. "To work with organisations focusing on BSL within culture and the arts to identify priorities within the BSL communities in Scotland."

2. "Explore existing support for organisations with a focus on heritage, culture and the arts – with a focus on BSL - across Scotland, to identify ways in which the Scottish Government can support growth for BSL in this sector, in line with the aims and ambitions of A Culture Strategy for Scotland."

Question 1.1.e – What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 74 responses to this question.
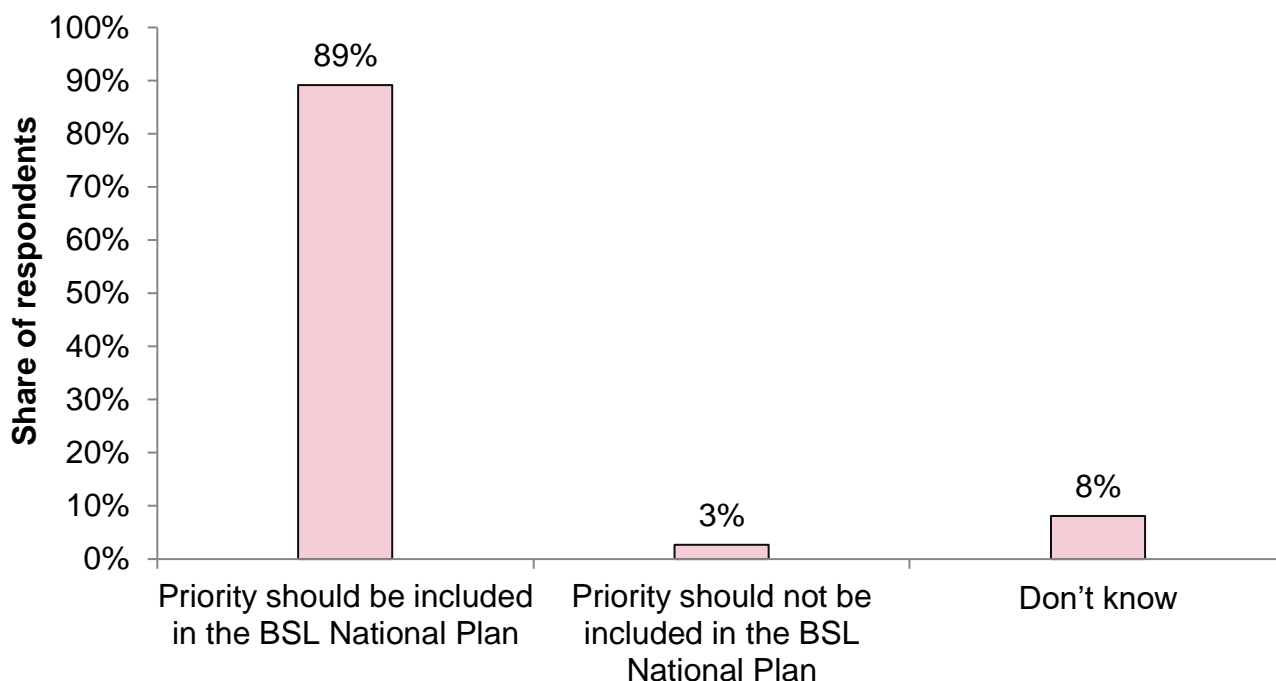
Most respondents to this question, 89%, supported the proposal that the Heritage and culture of BSL are included as a key priority within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. A small number of respondents, 3%, were against the Heritage and Culture of BSL being a key priority in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, while 8% answered "Don't know".

Question 1.1.e - What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 55 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Improves cross-cultural awareness

The majority of respondents supported this key priority as a means of improving cross-cultural awareness amongst the wider population. Almost half of all respondents to this question raised this theme, with the majority of those being organisations.

Improved awareness of BSL culture and heritage would ensure a nuanced understanding of the BSL and D/deaf community more broadly, ultimately improving social inclusion.

Moreover, the inclusion of BSL heritage and culture within mainstream representations of Scottish history is both enriching and empowering, reflecting a society that values "diversity, inclusivity, and cultural richness" (Organisation). Specific examples of how this could be implemented included integration within

existing museums or displaying historical plaques and figures marking deaf heritage around Scottish cities.

> "Very few people know about D/deaf culture and heritage; this would allow for more people to understand who D/deaf people are as a community." (Individual)

> "This priority is important to ensure there is meaningful engagement with the BSL community and efforts are made to understand the culture of the BSL community." (Organisation)

> "This is an extremely important area to the deaf community and typically has been excluded from contemporary culture. Including BSL would increase awareness and promote increased adoption making the community feel more valued within society." (Organisation)

Fosters a sense of individual and social identity

The second theme highlighted the importance of promoting this key priority as a means of fostering a sense of individual and social identity. The majority of the respondents who raised this theme were organisations.

Respondents discussed feeling proud and empowered when learning about their own heritage and culture and viewed this as a right that everyone should be afforded equally. Celebration of BSL culture and heritage was viewed as a meaningful opportunity to strengthen the community, share their rich and vibrant culture, and feel more widely valued within society. This was considered particularly important for children and young people as a "foundation for engaging as confident citizens" (Organisation). The benefits listed included greater visibility of deaf role models, the development of a secure sense of identity, and reduced loneliness and social isolation.

Within this theme, a small number of respondents stressed the importance of recognising the multiple groups within the D/deaf community, including those who do not use BSL as their primary communication method and LGBTQIA+ members. The promotion of heritage and culture should acknowledge and include the diverse perspectives and experiences of all the D/deaf community.

> "BSL is not just a mode of communication; it is a vibrant and distinct linguistic and cultural entity that holds immense value for the Deaf community. By promoting the heritage and culture of BSL, we are fostering a sense of identity, pride, and belonging among Deaf individuals…" (Organisation)

> "Everyone's identity/ culture and values are integral to who they are and how they operate within a community; celebrating different cultures and identities helps to bring richness to a community. Cultural connection in deaf and deafblind communities plays an important role in fostering positive mental health and should be grown to help the expansion of BSL and deaf culture, especially for young people during their transition from childhood to adulthood." (Organisation)

> "Celebrating deaf people is important; promoting deaf heritage demonstrates to deaf children that they can achieve anything." (Community Event)

Focusing on actions, monitoring, and delivery

The next theme focused on the actions, monitoring, and delivery of the key priority. Of the large minority of respondents that discussed this theme, there was an almost equal number of individuals and organisations.

Respondents called for an increase in measurable actions within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, as well as comprehensive strategies for monitoring and delivering any initiatives related to this key priority. For example, respondents were unclear whether the promotion of BSL heritage and culture would be conducted through education (such as inclusion within the national curriculum) or as part of the broader national culture and heritage agenda. There was also support for working in collaboration with BSL users to define the specific actions and outcomes related to this key priority.

Moreover, regarding the delivery of the key priority, respondents were supportive of increased funding to support grassroots clubs, charities, and organisations to deliver initiatives. There was also support for clarification from the Scottish Government on how funding can be accessed, as well as guidance on how to use the funding and due diligence to ensure efficacy.

> "There would need to be a clearer understanding of how this would be done depending on the audience – whether it is taught in schools or is part of the national culture and heritage agenda. The inclusion of the promotion of heritage and culture into the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 will also need to highlight how organisations will access resources, funding, expertise and any support to promote this as per the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. A wider support network – for example, Visit Scotland will also ensure that along with local residents, tourists will also be aware of BSL culture and heritage as an area of interest locally and nationally." (Organisation)

> "Promoting the culture and heritage of BSL is at the heart of the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, so it would be dispiriting to think that the next six years will be spent exploring opportunities rather than making the most of them." (Organisation)

Developing accessibility for BSL users to culture, arts, and heritage

The fourth theme suggested that the key priority should include a focus on BSL accessibility to culture, arts, and heritage as a whole. Respondents recognised that whilst promoting BSL heritage and culture is positive, the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 must also address widespread BSL inaccessibility to mainstream culture, heritage, arts, and entertainment more broadly despite some positive improvements in this area. Specific areas raised included theatres, museums, heritage sights, and galleries.

Suggestions offered by respondents to improve accessibility within the sector included the consistent provision of high-quality interpretation, ensuring BSL-accessible events were held regularly and at suitable times, and training staff in BSL to provide immediate support and guidance.

In addition to increasing BSL accessibility as a consumer to the sector, respondents were supportive of efforts to enable BSL participation as creators through enhanced training, volunteering and career pathways.

> "There are opportunities to embed BSL in the arts, media and cultural activities across Scotland by ensuring theatre performances are BSL interpreted and BSL performances are English interpreted to encourage more people to learn about and experience BSL culture. Equal opportunities for people whose first or preferred language is BSL is necessary to secure employment in the field of arts and media, improving representation." (Organisation)

> "It is also crucial to make history and heritage accessible in BSL, and to increase the representation of BSL users within the culture sector. Organisations in the arts, creative industries and heritage should provide an environment where BSL users enjoy access and services across the heritage and cultural sectors as their fellow citizens. All public events and programmes should be accessible to BSL users." (Organisation)

Ensuring equality of access and representation

The fifth most mentioned theme viewed the key priority as a basic right for BSL users. Respondents acknowledged that access to BSL heritage and culture was often viewed as a low, non-essential priority rather than the norm despite their positive effects on mental health and wellbeing. Comments were made about other recognised languages, such as Gaelic and Scots, noting the lack of investment in widening BSL representation in comparison. In addition to heritage and culture, respondents were particularly interested in greater representation within movies, sports, and historical figures.

To ensure the promotion of this key priority is truly accessible to the wider deaf community, it was suggested that alternative communication methods besides BSL – such as loop systems, lip speaking, or audio descriptions – were included in all initiatives.

> "In Scotland, BSL is recognised as a National Language, therefore, its heritage and culture should be celebrated, understood, and included. This should be part of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 with direction to work alongside arts and culture organisations on ways to ensure Deaf culture and BSL heritage is included and considered as part of Scotland's History." (Organisation)

> "If there are initiatives for other Scottish languages and their cultures like Gaelic and Scots, there needs to be something for BSL too." (Individual)

> "The arts are often viewed as a luxury that enhances life for the lucky; some like going on holiday. The arts need to be viewed as a fundamental form of expression that is an intrinsic part of how humans communicate their views, experiences, and distress. At times, it can replace language when experiences are difficult to articulate. Creativity has been an embedded aspect of human behaviour across the course of humanity. It can close social distance in creating

safe spaces that allow people to see the perspective of others through art forms such as film, theatre, and dance." (Organisation)

Integrating the key priority within education

The final theme identified supported the integration of the key priority within the education system. Of the significant minority of respondents that raised this theme, it was discussed equally amongst individuals and organisations.

Respondents were in favour of teaching all pupils the heritage and culture of BSL alongside the language, within academic institutions from nursery to higher education. Examples of how to implement this included teaching BSL poetry, prose, and theatre as well as introducing awareness initiatives similar to 'Black History Month'.

"If the heritage and culture of BSL is included within a wider diversity programme in schools and for parents/caregivers and others learning the language, this will help foster the promotion of culture and heritage of the Deaf Community and others using BSL and Tactile BSL. Diversifying literacy learning in the classroom to include signed stories, poetry, film education and drama, for example, are ways of integrating and encouraging bilingualism and bimodal bilingualism." (Organisation)

"Integrating BSL heritage and culture into educational settings enriches the learning experience for all students. It promotes cross-cultural awareness and provides a unique perspective on language, communication, and expression." (Organisation)

Social Care and Wellbeing

Introduction

The Scottish Government acknowledges the importance of enabling all individuals to flourish in their daily lives, which includes accessing and receiving the right support for their needs. For the BSL communities, this means receiving all support and information in BSL, with an understanding of their culture.

The consultation set out the following draft actions:

1. "To explore how the National Care Service co-design involves BSL users, and includes provisions for BSL users."

2. "Support Public Health Scotland in the development of guidance around BSL access, including use of BSL/English interpreting support in various formats."

Question 1.1.f – What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 76 responses to this question.
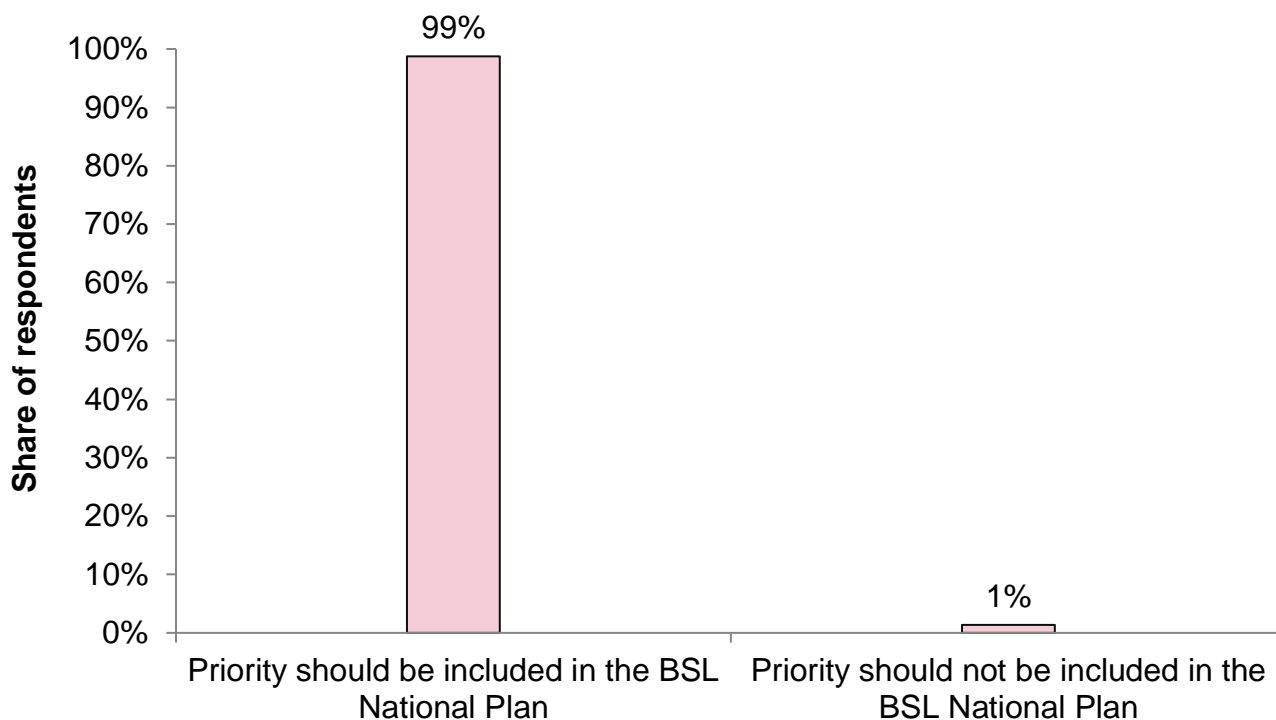
The overwhelming majority of respondents to the consultation, 99%, agreed that Social care and wellbeing should be a key priority in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Only 1% of respondents were against this proposal.

Question 1.1.f – What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 53 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Increasing focus on this key priority

The most common theme was the support of this key priority, with a large minority of respondents suggesting that it should have a greater focus within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 given the extent of the issues and barriers to access faced by the BSL community. Of the respondents that raised this theme, it was supported equally by individuals and organisations.

A few respondents did not believe the two actions (8. To explore how the National Care Service co-design involves BSL users and includes provisions for BSL users; 9. Support Public Health Scotland in the development of guidance around BSL access, including the use of BSL/ English interpreting support in various formats) were sufficient and described the situation as deteriorating since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Where respondents provided reasons for their support, these either referenced the detrimental impact of barriers to accessing social care and wellbeing services on the mental health and wellbeing of the BSL community – such as heightened social isolation, particularly for elderly BSL users – as well as the empowering effects of greater independence and equal access, should these barriers be addressed.

Specific suggestions included creating separate priorities for social care, wellbeing and mental health and expanding the key priority to include the private sector.

> "100% agree with this; it is very vital for me to have the same access as hearing peers. I refuse to rely on hearing peers to help me access services, why should I? I am perfectly able to access services myself, but of course, with the daily barriers I face, I feel I am being denied the right to access the services that I pay tax for in my own language." (Individual)

> "This is a vital priority and should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. We feel strongly that sensory loss should be embedded in a number of strategies and across all services. Social Care services being accessible to the BSL community is of paramount importance." (Organisation)

> "Disappointingly, these proposals offer very little (two points focus on this, and they are very vague in nature) compared to the long list of issues the Deaf community faces. The contrast between the anxiety and concern BSL signers experience whenever they encounter poor services and the peace of mind when authorities take proactive action to ensure effective provision could not be more stark." (Organisation)

Expanding the BSL professional workforce

The second most frequent theme was the need to expand the BSL professional workforce. Respondents identified this as both: (i) increasing the number of Guide Communicators and BSL/ English interpreters available, and (ii) training existing staff within the sector in BSL language and culture. The latter was seen as particularly important, reducing the barriers to communication for BSL users and for privacy concerns where sensitive information is disclosed. For example, a small number of respondents were increasingly worried about disclosure when working with remote interpreters. More broadly, there was support for upskilling the entire workforce (receptionists, cleaners, support workers, paramedics, doctors, etc.) with a particular focus on emergency service staff to ensure essential information could be communicated immediately (such as allergies). This was framed as especially pressing in light of BSL/ English interpreter shortages, meaning respondents often had experienced prolonged wait times.

A related sub-theme expressed the importance of having a right to choose how users access services, whether through BSL/ English interpretation or directly to deaf professionals. Choice was seen as a fundamental human right, and the expansion of the BSL professional workforce could facilitate this.

"Children of non-hearing parents should not have to translate for parents or other relatives at any appointment - medical, financial, personal both for the dignity of both parties and also for confidentiality." (Individual)

"Accessing social care and wellbeing services in an individual's first language as a fundamental human right. By increasing the number of BSL interpreters and support workers in the sector, BSL users will not be discriminated against when accessing social care and wellbeing services." (Organisation)

"I always have different BSL/English interpreters at health appointments. I'd prefer the same one for every appointment. It's important to have choices. I should not have to worry about who's coming at every appointment." (Community Event)

Improving mental health support

Next, the need for improved mental health support for BSL users was identified as the third most common theme. The majority of the respondents that discussed this theme were organisations.

This included tailored support for specific groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, children and young people, as well as the elderly. The majority of respondents discussed the increased link between deafness and mental ill health, loneliness, and increased social isolation. There was overall agreement that mental health actions from the previous BSL Plan National Plan 2017-2023 should not have been dropped and still remain an urgent priority.

Moreover, respondents requested that wellbeing services targeted to BSL users should be made more visible to the community to better understand what is already available.

"Deafness can lead to social isolation. Wellbeing and mental health services in BSL are vital." (Organisation)

"Lots of D/deaf people struggle with mental health due to things like isolation; this part of the act would allow for D/deaf people to feel supported and have a space for them to go if they needed support." (Individual)

"The actions make no mention of the mental health and associated wellbeing of Deaf people. Evidence-based research clearly shows the mental health of Deaf people is significantly worse than that of other groups in society. Why has this been omitted?" (Organisation)

Increasing cultural awareness

Increasing cultural awareness amongst staff within the social care and wellbeing sector was the fourth most frequent theme amongst responses. The majority of respondents raising this theme were organisations.

Respondents referenced the additional burden experienced by BSL users when needing to continuously explain their individual needs and experiences.

Suggestions included enhanced mandatory training for staff to ensure the diverse needs of the entire D/deaf community can be consistently met, including intersectionality awareness, BSL family dynamics, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

"We must ensure that people are not challenged to have to explain their culture or encounter unnecessary barriers to being heard and understood." (Organisation)

"The Scottish Government recognises the importance of ensuring that individuals can thrive in their daily lives, which includes accessing wellbeing services and receiving the right care for their needs. For the BSL communities, this means being able to receive support in BSL with an understanding of their culture as well as being able to receive information in BSL." (Organisation)

Guaranteeing BSL-accessible information

The fifth most frequently occurring theme identified the need for consistent BSL-accessible information across the sector. This was viewed as a key action to ensure BSL users can remain independent and make informed decisions regarding their care, health, and wellbeing. The majority of respondents who raised this theme were individuals and BSL users.

Examples included providing multiple contact options for appointments (such as email or SMS/text) and ensuring announcements are delivered in BSL-accessible formats in all health and social care settings.

Moreover, respondents were supportive of enforcing accessible feedback and complaint mechanisms within the sector to ensure services continue to meet the needs of the community. An additional suggestion included increasing state funding in assistive technology to further support accessibility within social care and wellbeing.

"I previously worked in social care. I have seen so many Deaf BSL users fall through the gaps due to " professional" decisions which were thought best for the person without really discussing it with the person. This lack of person-centred care is because they do not know how to deal with BSL users." (Organisation)

"[…] communication on issues of Public Health may carry an additional urgency.

Practice developed in communicating public health messages on Covid 19 may also provide extensive examples of good practice/lessons learned for adoption in terms of the proposed Accessibility priority." (Organisation)

"Making information accessible in BSL is fundamental to ensuring equitable access to vital information and services." (Individual)

Ensuring the inclusion of the whole D/deaf community

The next most common theme stated the importance of including and recognising the BSL community in its entirety within the sector as a whole, as well as any individual BSL National Plan initiatives.

Respondents stressed the need for an intersectional lens when addressing barriers to accessing social care and wellbeing services, as well as greater recognition of,

and resources for, non-BSL users within the D/deaf community. Respondents also pointed to geographical discrepancies across Scotland, and urged the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 to recognise this in order to adequately meet the needs and experiences of all members of the community.

> "An intersectional approach should also be adopted. For example, older BSL users might have additional barriers in accessing support and might need more preventative measures to feel safer." (Organisation)

> "I agree, but again, please don't forget about those D/deaf people who don't sign and feel isolated because they are not part of the BSL community or the hearing community." (Individual)

Targeting care services

The urgent need for specific attention to be paid to care services was identified as the seventh most frequent theme. The majority of respondents that discussed this theme were organisations.

Respondents noted that many staff within the care and residential homes were unable to communicate with BSL-users, drastically affecting the quality and appropriateness of their care as well as their level of positive social interaction. Respondents suggested an increase in care staff trained in BSL through mandatory training requirements.

> "We are extremely aware of the isolation that occurs when people who require communication support find themselves in residential or care home settings." (Organisation)

> "[…] the clients are very vulnerable to unintended abuse or lashing out as they fear they don't know why or what is being asked of or done to them. For someone with dementia, the ability to communicate diminishes and is often confusing, but without a BSL background and a dementia background staff won't have a clue." (Individual)

> "I quiver at the thought of going into care for those reasons […] who would communicate with me? You would deteriorate fast. It has happened to me in the hospital, awful experience." (Community Event)

Concerns regarding strategy and delivery

Lastly, respondents requested the development of a comprehensive strategy and delivery plan for this key priority. The majority of the respondents that discussed this theme were organisations.

Respondents were eager to see specific actions related to improving social care and wellbeing for BSL users, expressing frustration at the perceived lack of actionable initiatives. Respondents were also supportive of co-designing actions in partnership with the BSL community to ensure their relevance and appropriateness. Regarding delivery, respondents were in favour of an increase in funding as well as standardised guidelines for services to ensure consistency across services, as well as mechanisms to enable communication of lessons learnt and best practice across the sector.

"Funding should be available to organisations to make this a reality." (Individual)

"Health and social care remain an area where BSL users need extra support to be able to access services equally and the proposed action to ensure that the National Care Service co-design involves BSL users and includes provisions for them is sensible. Local authorities that have to both provide BSL National Plans and deliver social care should be encouraged in the meantime to consider social care in their BSL National Plans." (Organisation)

4. Overall views on the BSL National Plan 2023-2029

Revision of actions

Question 2.1 – Are there any actions that should be revised in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 73 responses to this question.
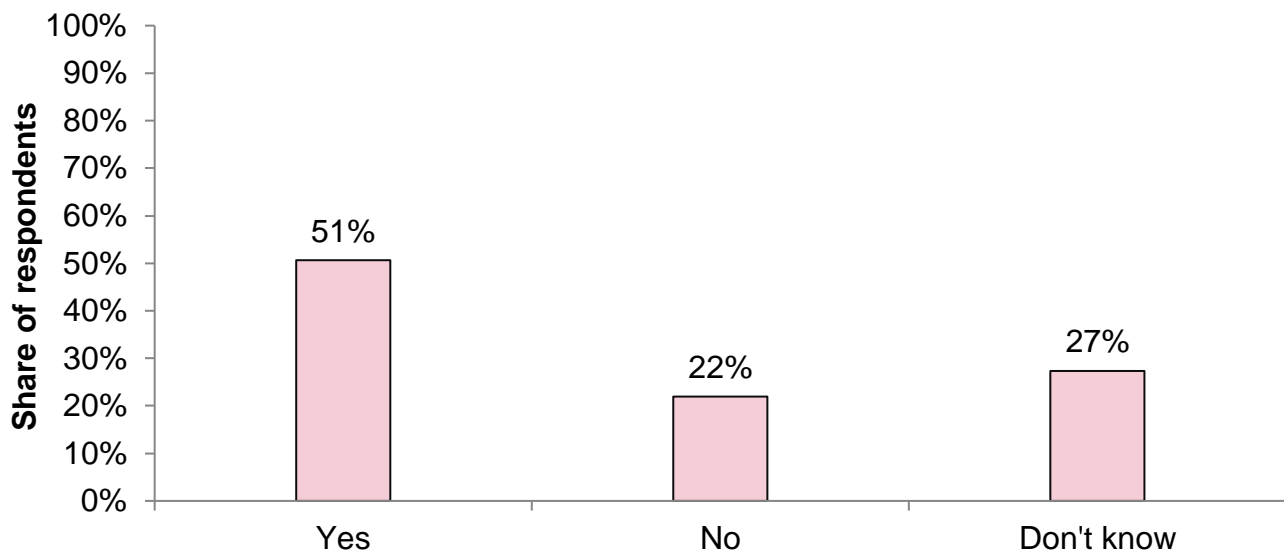
The most common answer to this question, supported by 51% of respondents, was that there are actions that should be revised in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. On the contrary, 22% of respondents did not agree with revisions of actions in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, while 27% were undecided or uncertain (answered "Don't know").

Question 2.2 - Are there any actions that should be revised in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 44 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Need for actual implementation of those BSL National Plans, including a commitment to funding

The most prevalent theme among responses was respondents who called the Scottish Government to proceed with actual implementation of the actions (and ensuring there is funding for that to happen), which would enable assessment of those interventions in practice rather than only in theory. Respondents in this theme felt that the language used in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 is not detailed or specific enough and does not commit the Scottish Government to specific actions in pursuing the stated priorities. Finally, a small number of respondents reported that the consultation document and draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029 as presented

were difficult for BSL users to understand. This theme was particularly common among organisation respondents, as it was mentioned in the responses of approximately half of the organisation respondents to this question.

"As it stands, the actions of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 lack the required substance. The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 needs tangible goals and a commitment to achieving these." (Organisation)

"I feel currently it is a bit woolly and difficult to pin down what is actually going to be done. Words like "explore", "seek views" ...unless funding and action follow we are all wasting our time." (Organisation)

Greater focus on education and more BSL courses

The next prevalent theme, was discussions around improvements in the focus on the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing young people and children. This theme was more common among individual respondents and among respondents who are BSL users. Overall, there was significant support among the respondents to the online consultation and the community events to include the commitment to providing more BSL courses as part of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 across early years, children, young people, parents, and tutors. A small number of respondents suggested that there should be higher standards for BSL teachers than BSL Level 1 knowledge, particularly there was support for training teachers to a minimum of Level 6. Furthermore, a small number of respondents suggested that the provision of BSL education should be expanded beyond age 5 and to more advanced language levels. Finally, respondents in this theme also discussed that there should be greater consideration of the different circumstances of people in the deaf community. Specific topics raised in relation to this point included support for provision of BSL courses for young people who might not have learned BSL at an earlier age, or people who lost hearing later in life, as well as for audiology services, and for provision of BSL courses for children with cochlear implants.

"The key themes emerging from parent feedback included the need for a commitment to fund BSL provision, including free classes for families in the early years and beyond into school age, with more information on language and communication choices for parents available and promoted in early years services." (Community Event)

"Why stop at age 5 – it does not make sense. We need to make sure support is extended until 16." (Community Event)

"Why stop at L3? Why not L6? Why put limits to our own language? Hearing children don't have any language limits. We should have the same opportunities as hearing children in accessing our language." (Community Event)

Specific recommendations

The next common theme among responses, was respondents who gave specific recommendations on topics that should be given greater consideration in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. This theme was more common among organisation respondents than among individual respondents. A few respondents felt that there should be a greater emphasis on BSL accessibility particularly in the workplace, but also in higher education. Proposed measures to support greater accessibility mentioned in consultation responses, included the provision of a live interpreter for interviews, and encouraging businesses to take measures to make their workplace and roles offered more BSL-friendly. Furthermore, a small number of respondents felt that more could be done to support families and children, including BSL support for hearing parents who have deaf children, as well as improving the information provided to parents of deaf children. Finally, a small number of respondents suggested that there should be increased awareness and training surrounding BSL among health and social care staff to ensure people are provided with necessary accommodations.

"Actions under 'workforce'. Should include working with private and 3rd sector employers to educate on how to make roles accessible to Deaf people, provide interpreters and train colleagues in BSL and create a Deaf positive work culture." (Individual)

"Providing information about BSL and Deaf community to parents at place of diagnosis (hospital) via specialised and positive role model such as Deaf person trained in this role […] Funding early childhood BSL immersion programmes for families (e.g., Deaf au pair with incentives, BSL-only weekends, family camps, etc) […] Deaf support workers for families (e.g., one person for all liaison, same as one central interpreting agency)." (Organisation)

BSL National Plans should be informed by people with lived experience of BSL usage, and local needs

The second most common theme was raised by BSL users who felt that not enough was done to reach out to the community and incorporate their views. Important points may be missed without such engagement, and wrong assumptions can be made. Respondents in this theme suggested that BSL community stakeholders should be engaged in the policy planning process. Additionally, a small number of respondents argued that local needs, especially from underrepresented areas should be considered. In that way the actions and plans relating to the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 will ensure all needs of the BSL community, including in local areas, will be reflected and accounted for. This theme was more common among organisations and among BSL users.

"Engaging in a comprehensive assessment in collaboration with BSL community members, experts, and relevant stakeholders would be beneficial to determine if any actions should be revised. This evaluation should consider the evolving needs and priorities of the BSL community and identify areas where improvements or adjustments may be necessary." (Individual)

"Actions tend to be driven by our communities of interest – the BSL users are key drivers for development of most actions based on their feedback. In consultation with our local BSL communities, there was a strong sense of wanting things that are local and relevant to them for their daily life. Will public bodies have the freedom to create sub priorities based on local needs?" (Organisation)

Additional priorities from the previous BSL National Plan 2023-2029

Finally, the last prevalent theme among responses to the online consultation and community events, related to the inclusion of additional priorities to the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, such as access to healthcare, accessibility to transport, and mental health. Some of these respondents felt that there was not enough progress since the BSL National Plan 2017-2023 to justify removing actions included in the previous BSL National Plan 2017-2023 from the new BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Additionally, it was argued that there should have been more monitoring and reporting from the Scottish Government on the progress since the BSL National Plan 2017-2023.

"Where is transport in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029? BSL access on buses, trains, etc.? Transport is important for Aberdeen/NE Scotland. It needs to be put on the map again, as it's important for Deaf people to be able to travel around Scotland. Access to transport needs to include public announcements, for example, CalMac, to ensure that announcements on the public address system during crossings are accessible." (Community Event)

"Why is health and mental health not included? "Absolutely necessary" to include mental health." (Community Event)

Additional actions

Question 3.1 - Are there any additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Closed question)

There were 72 responses to this question.
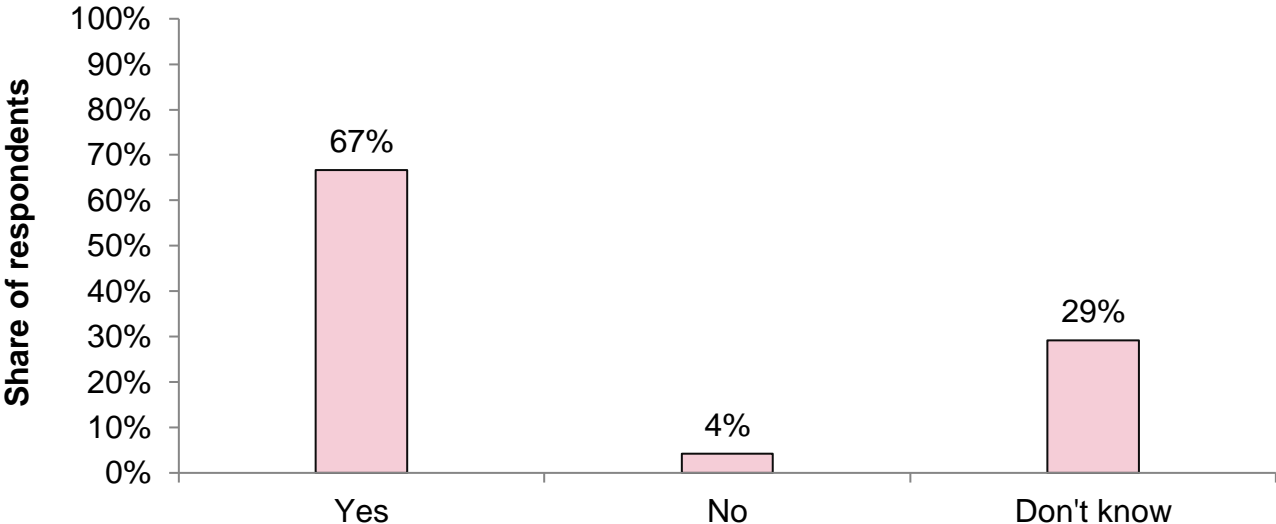
A significant majority of respondents (67%) supported that additional actions should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Only 4% of respondents answered that there are no additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, while a significant number of respondents (29%) answered that they did not know.

Question 3.2 - Are there any additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029? (Open question)

There were 50 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Expanding opportunities to learn BSL

The most frequent theme focused on increasing opportunities to learn BSL. Over half of the total respondents discussed this theme, and the majority of these were individuals. There was an equal divide among respondents who were and were not BSL users.

For a small minority of respondents, efforts to increase BSL acquisition amongst users and non-users would both promote accessibility (through the widespread use of BSL) and increase awareness of its community, culture, and heritage. Fully funded opportunities to learn BSL, including in-person and online methods to maximise accessibility, were discussed as an urgent priority for families of BSL users from the point of need.

Respondents were also supportive of integrating BSL as a language within the education system, either through bilingual schools or by including BSL as a language option for all children. It was considered essential that staff within education, as well as public services more widely, be taught BSL as a compulsory part of their training.

Informal opportunities to learn BSL were also seen as important for life-long language development, with a small minority of respondents noting that they had limited adult language skills as opportunities to learn beyond early years were restricted. Examples included BSL-friendly TV, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, and BSL cafes (such as those organised by Deafblind Scotland).

> "Access to BSL tuition must be provided free of charge to deaf children and the families of those with deaf children. It is shameful families are having to spend thousands of pounds on BSL courses to try to provide their children with an essential way to communicate." (Individual)

> "The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 is a significant opportunity to ensure BSL becomes an accredited school qualification within the full Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The 1 + 2 language initiative to promote the learning of languages in primary school provides a clear model through which BSL could be included. Developing these opportunities would have the benefit of strengthening and enriching the inclusive education experiences of all children and young people." (Organisation)

"As a child, you are taught BSL, and if it is not reinforced, you end up losing that language. I grew up with hearing people, so I didn't learn how to interact with the deaf community. I was taught from a very young age to sign, but I don't know enough to conduct a whole conversation. I can tell people, 'You look nice,' and I can understand when they reply, but I can't reply the same way." (Community Event)

Increasing awareness of, and collaboration with, the BSL community

The next key concern was raising awareness of, and increasing collaboration with, the BSL community across Scotland. The majority of the respondents who raised this theme were individuals.

With regards to awareness, responses referred to: (i) an improved knowledge of local dialects and signs within BSL training, (ii) an inclusive definition of the D/deaf community to include not only BSL users but also deafened, deafblind, and hard of hearing people, (iii) formally recognising that deaf people may use alternative communication methods and aids (as opposed, or in addition, to BSL), and (iv) an intersectional approach to addressing inequalities and barriers identified within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. It was hoped that greater awareness might reduce the prevailing bias within healthcare and education for spoken language over BSL.

In parallel to this, respondents were supportive of establishing formalised networks and forums to enable consistent, long-term collaboration with the BSL community in order to ensure services and initiatives remained responsive to their evolving needs and experiences.

"There is scope to include a commitment to the intersectionality of BSL using which recognises multiple barriers to accessing support for deaf people of different genders, nationalities, ethnicities, ages, disabilities and income levels including a commitment to subsidising funding for BSL and interpreting courses for disadvantaged groups." (Organisation)

"The direction of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 needs to be stated more clearly, i.e., for all deaf (including deaf, deafblind, deafened, hard of hearing and hearing loss), not just deaf and deafblind alone users of BSL – this was highlighted after the launch of the BSL National Plan 2017-2023." (Organisation)

"This BSL National Plan 2023-2029 may be detrimental to the wider deaf community if the definition and clarification of Deaf and deaf/hard of hearing people is not communicated. Without this definition, the wider society may assume that the whole deaf community means that people are 100% deaf, which is not the case in the majority of cases." (Community Event)

Targeting focus on social care and wellbeing

The third most common theme called for an increased focus on social care and wellbeing within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Of those who responded to this question, the majority were organisations and a large minority were BSL users.

Respondents were aware of its existing inclusion within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 and discussed the key priority in detail within Question 1.1f, however, as reflected in the latter, there was widespread consensus that the focus on this should be increased.

In particular, respondents discussed a lack of progress within mental health services, elderly care, and additional support for harassment, hate crime, and cyberbullying. A small number of respondents suggested that measures taken in the previous BSL National Plan 2017-2023 had been insufficient and that mental health should be reintegrated more strongly. A small number of respondents also called for the inclusion of sports and recreation within this priority, such as swimming pools, cookery classes, or bowling lanes.

> "Specialised support for the Elderly Deaf community and Dementia sufferers such as care home provision. (There are currently none in Scotland). Any elderly Deaf BSL users going into care declines rapidly due to a lack of communication and stimulation, and their quality of life diminishes." (Organisation)

> "Mental health improvement support was felt to not have progressed well over the years and still needs to be a priority. Deafblind people have been shown to have a 3-fold risk of depression, and many during the consultation talked about the mental health challenges of living with deafblindness with key examples of the need for better access to specialist language support during these challenging times." (Organisation)

Broadening accessibility to public life

The fourth most frequent theme was the need for BSL accessibility to public life beyond essential services. Access to, and confidence in, public transport was particularly important, as well as broadening access to civic engagement, entertainment, culture, and the arts. For example, a small number of respondents referred to issues with accessibility and awareness within TV shows, films, and theatres. There was also support for free companion travel and accessible help points on public transport, as well as BSL accessible announcements on diversions or emergencies when travelling. Additional areas included higher or further education and social or activity clubs.

An important sub-theme noted the regional differences in access to public life for BSL users across Scotland and called for initiatives which sought to address these inequities.

> "For example, the provision of grants for BSL interpreting support to allow BSL users to access social activities within mainstream groups/clubs. Currently, they often have to depend on volunteers/family members/members of the group to access these or else miss out on pursuing interests." (Organisation)

"A lot of the activities and resources tend to be produced or aimed at the central belt in Scotland – more actions need to be considered for those in different geographic areas (Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Highlands) so that BSL users have equal opportunities to access information, leisure, culture, heritage and more in their local areas." (Organisation)

Addressing issues within the BSL professional workforce

Addressing issues within the BSL professional workforce was identified as the next most common theme, receiving support for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. This encompassed multiple sub-themes, including: (i) increasing the number and quality of BSL/ English interpreters available both in-person and remotely across Scotland, (ii) improving pay and support mechanisms to increase workforce retention rates, (iii) expanding training routes to becoming a registered BSL/ English interpreter and Guide Communicator, and (iv) enhancing cultural awareness education within existing training to ensure all communication professionals are appropriately equipped to meet the diverse needs of the community.

More specifically, respondents were interested in increasing the diversity of interpreters (mentioning a lack of both male and LGBTQIA+ interpreters explicitly). There was also support for an increase in Guide Communicators, as these were described as more valuable to BSL users and differed from the transactional support of BSL/ English interpreters.

"Growing the pool of interpreters is not enough if we are seeing people leave the profession. We also need in place support to retain skilled workers in Scotland." (Individual)

"Develop programmes to train and certify more BSL interpreters and educators to address the shortage of professionals in these fields." (Individual)

Streamlining management and delivery

The sixth most common theme concerned the management and delivery of initiatives resulting from the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. The majority of the respondents who discussed this theme were organisations.

As reflected in other questions across this consultation, respondents were particularly concerned about the BSL National Plan 2023-2029's alignment with existing policies, such as the See Hear strategy and the previous BSL National Plan 2017-2023. This included ensuring that any additional initiatives implemented as a result of the new BSL National Plan 2023-2029 should not duplicate or merge with adjacent initiatives, but complement and build on these instead.

Moreover, responses frequently suggested that the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 also include standardised guidelines and increased funding to ensure consistency across relevant services and organisations. Respondents also suggested establishing communities of practice to ensure lessons learnt and best practice could be shared quickly and effectively across Scotland.

> "Streamlining of actions and guidelines aimed at private organisations that serve the public, including support for users and staff, would be useful. This would help increase the BSL workforce and support high standards of BSL interpretation and translation." (Organisation)

Increasing support in the workplace

The final theme called for workplace support to be included within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Of the respondents who raised this theme, it was supported equally by individuals and organisations, as well as BSL and non-BSL users.

A number of existing issues were identified related to both BSL awareness and the accessibility of legal support. For example, respondents referred to insufficient BSL awareness within the workplace and, consequently, the widespread inability to provide adequate support. Alongside this, respondents expressed concern about the difficulty with which BSL users could access support in the event of disability discrimination. Suggestions included enhancing monitoring and enforcement and focusing on improving BSL awareness and language skills within the entire workforce to reduce reliance on BSL/English interpreters.

> "Implement policies and initiatives to increase employment opportunities for individuals in the BSL community, fostering economic independence and inclusion." (Individual)

> "Actions under 'workforce'. Should include working with private and 3rd sector employers to educate on how to make roles accessible to Deaf people, provide interpreters and train colleagues in BSL and create a Deaf positive work culture." (Individual)

Key changes for BSL users

Question 4.1 - What is the one key change you would like to see happening for BSL users in Scotland by 2029? (Open question)

There were 69 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Reducing barriers to communication across Scotland

The most frequently discussed theme was reducing barriers to communication for BSL users across Scotland. A large minority of the total number of online consultation respondents to this question discussed this theme, with the majority being organisations.

The areas highlighted by respondents as having the most prevalent barriers to communication were healthcare, education, employment, emergency services, democratic processes, and cultural activities. The effects of these barriers for BSL users were described as reduced independence, disempowerment, and an inability to participate in daily life.

Suggestions to remove communication barriers targeted either the availability of BSL/ English interpreters or assistive technologies. For example, a significant minority of respondents addressed the inconsistent availability of interpreters across Scotland and the frequent need to cancel medical appointments due to this. A small number of respondents also supported the use of visible signals within public spaces to indicate where BSL was used and whom they could ask for support.

> "By implementing and enforcing these standards, we can significantly reduce communication barriers and create an environment where BSL users can fully participate in all aspects of Scottish society. This change would empower BSL users and demonstrate Scotland's commitment to inclusivity and accessibility for all its citizens." (Individual)

> "The key change we would like to see would be the increased availability of BSL interpreters nationwide that will allow BSL users to access services effectively which in turn, will also advance equality of opportunity for them." (Organisation)

Increasing opportunities to learn BSL

The following theme wanted to see more opportunities to learn BSL in Scotland by 2029. The majority of respondents who raised this theme were individuals.

This theme was similar in content to responses in Question 3.2, including increased efforts to increase BSL acquisition amongst both users and non-users. Parents of BSL users were particularly mindful of isolating deaf children from learning BSL away from their peers and supported the integration of BSL within educational settings as well as informal opportunities to learn amongst deaf peers (such as peer-to-peer support). This also included early years support, such as in nurseries and toddler groups.

Again, full-funded BSL education was highlighted as a critical priority for deaf people and their families from the point of need. Suggestions included online and in-person formats, family-friendly lessons, and a range of times and local locations. A small number of respondents also requested that courses be available to start flexibly throughout the year.

Moreover, the majority of respondents stated that learning opportunities should be widely state-funded over the long term, prioritising access to families of BSL users and individuals needing to transition to visual or tactile communication methods.

> "The families, friends, educators and health professionals of every child whose first or preferred language is BSL are supported to learn the language and culture of BSL and the child feels supported and nurtured and acquires language at the same rate as their hearing peers." (Individual)

> "The way to have the greatest general impact would be to focus on putting in place high-quality BSL skills teaching for everyone at all levels and all ages, Deaf and hearing – so that families, Deaf children, hearing learners at school, professionals developing skills (including teachers and interpreters but also carers, audiologists, NHS staff, etc), ALL get taught well, affordably, on a

sustained basis and to a high degree of fluency, thereby learning language skills that will last them a lifetime while also fully accessing associated information about Deaf culture, heritage and history." (Organisation)

"It is exorbitantly expensive -- thousands of pounds, and that's just for *one* person/parent. We had to take out loans and crowdfund. It's humiliating and enraging and causes immense despair and years of profound helplessness -- because without these lessons, we could not communicate with our children. Parents of hearing children get the ability to communicate with their children for free from birth. Parents of Deaf children should get the same." (Community Event)

Developing mental health and wellbeing support

The third most frequent theme referred to the development of mental health and wellbeing support for BSL users. The majority of respondents who discussed this theme were individuals.

As above, this theme was repeatedly discussed throughout the consultation, with particular detail in Question 1.1f. Similarly to the latter, responses called for an increased focus on mental health and wellbeing within the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Respondents here also highlighted the need for increased support for families of BSL users, as well as an increase in deaf wellbeing services (including peer-to-peer support, mentorship, weekly support groups, and deaf cafes).

With regards to the support services themselves, respondents were interested in seeing more cultural and intersectional understandings of the needs of the community, in addition to an increase in deaf staff themselves. It was encouraged that the Scottish Government play an active role in supporting deaf support services to ensure they can continue to work with the community.

"We hope to see those from marginalised communities, such as LGBT+ D/deaf people, having access to provision and support which is fully affirmative of their identity and understanding of their intersecting experiences." (Organisation)

"I think a mental health service specifically for BSL users would be very popular and beneficial if it was accessible all throughout Scotland." (Individual)

Legitimising BSL as a national language

The next most common theme was increased efforts to legitimise BSL as a national language by 2029. Examples of how this might be implemented included teaching BSL as a second language in schools, ensuring the knowledge of BSL amongst all public service staff through mandatory training, and implementing BSL within all entertainment and media services (such as the news or cinemas). The BSL Highland Pack was highlighted as a specific example of good practice which could provide the foundation for nationwide strategies.

"Recognition of BSL as one of Scotland's minority languages alongside Scots and Gaelic. Equality is not about providing access just for events; there is a risk that this just becomes a tokenistic approach. The public sector should lead by example in embedding and implementing practices that are equitable and accessible." (Organisation)

"Normalising the use of and access to BSL through inclusion in school curricula leading to greater inclusion of BSL users in our communities and to improved equality." (Organisation)

Addressing stigmatisation and ignorance

The fifth theme called for increased efforts to address stigmatisation and improve awareness of BSL language and culture. Respondents were unhappy with existing levels of public awareness and acceptance of BSL and tactile BSL, as well as the D/deaf community more widely. To tackle ableism and stereotypical attitudes and promote the inclusion of D/deaf people in public life, respondents supported greater availability of information about BSL language, culture, history, and heritage. It was hoped that improving awareness would support younger generations within the D/deaf community to grow up proud and empowered.

"A greater appreciation and understanding of the challenges faced by BSL users in daily life." (Organisation)

"My parents always believe that hearing people know best. We need to change this attitude within our community. Deaf people know better about being Deaf." (Community Event)

Improving support in the workplace

Improving support within the workplace was identified as the final theme for this question. Within this theme, it was suggested that support should be delivered in two ways: (i) to BSL users directly, such as through increased access to BSL/ English interpreters, and (ii) to organisations, promoting awareness, positive employment practices, and guidance on how to best support employees.

Alongside this, respondents were supportive of increased opportunities for BSL users to enter and remain in high-quality employment. Examples included clear pathways for transitions to employment, increased targeted paid and volunteering opportunities, and the development of an independent training centre to provide training for deaf people to enter the workforce (such as BSL teachers, classroom assistants, and social workers).

"That it becomes commonplace for a BSL interpreter to be in the workplace just as common and usual as to train people in First Aid so that those who use BSL are not made to feel "othered"." (Individual)

"Employers know how to supportively interview, recruit and employ a Deaf person." (Individual)

5. Views on Contact Scotland BSL

The Scottish Government funds the [Contact Scotland BSL](#) online interpreting Video Relay Service, which enables Deaf and Deafblind BSL users to telephone, via video relay interpreters, private sector numbers as well as statutory and third sector numbers, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Contact Scotland BSL service is provided by Sign Language Interactions (SLI) on behalf of the Scottish Government and it offers BSL users the means to communicate in real-time, with services and family and friends. The service is also accessible to Deafblind BSL users, by making use of braille displays and speech synthesizers.

Question 5 – Are you aware of the Contact Scotland BSL service? (Closed question)

There were 73 responses to this question.
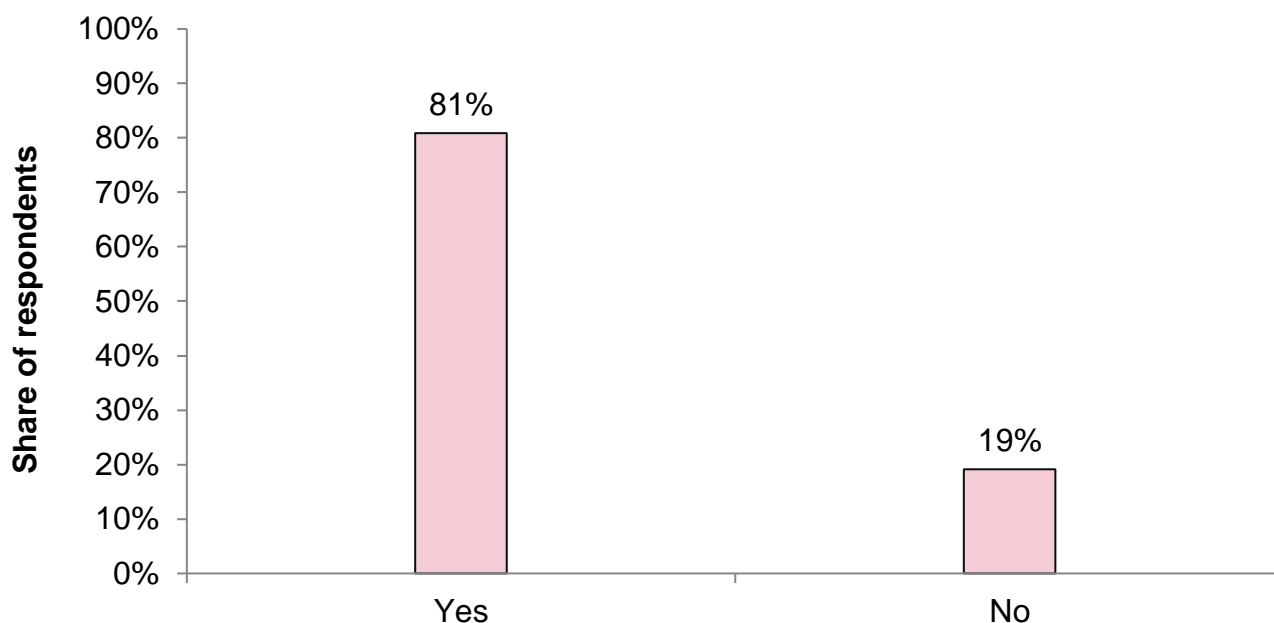
Most respondents (81%) answered that they were aware of the Contact Scotland BSL service, compared to 19% who answered that they were not aware of the service. Additionally, as presented in Appendix 4, of the 20 total BSL users who replied to this question, 80% answered that they were aware of the service, while 20% were not aware of the service. Of the 28 total respondents to this question who were not BSL users, 79% were aware of the service, and 21% were not.

Question 6 – How often do you typically use the Contact Scotland BSL service? (Closed question)

There were 70 responses to this question.
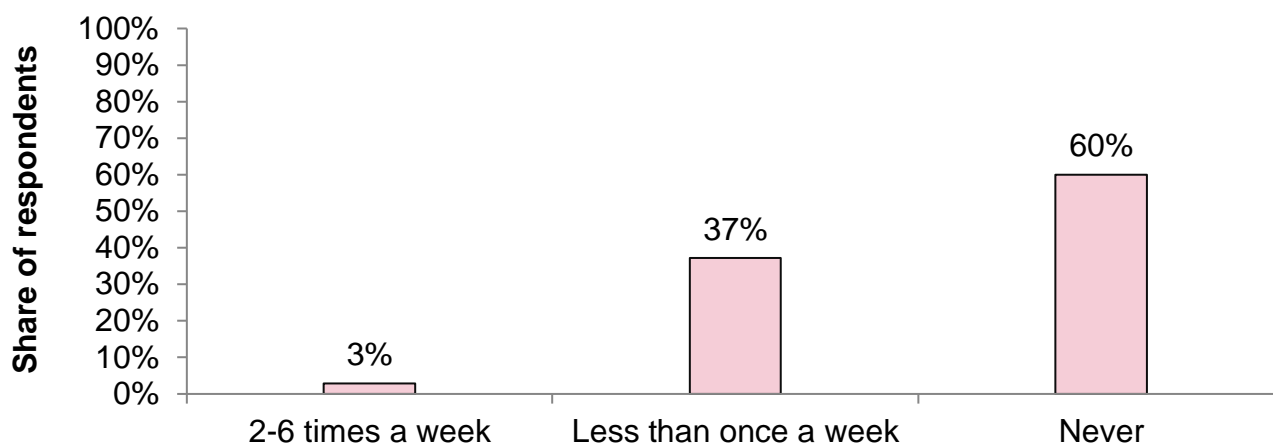
The majority of respondents to the consultation (60%) answered that they never use the Contact Scotland BSL service. The second most common group of respondents, 37%, was those who use the Contact Scotland BSL service but less than once a week, while only 3% of respondents answered that they use the Contact Scotland BSL service 2-6 times per week. Additionally, as presented in Appendix 4, of the 20 total BSL users who replied to this question, 10% answered that they use the service 2-6 times a week, 40% use it less than once a week, and 50% never use it. Of the 27 total respondents to this question who were not BSL users, nobody use the service 2-6 times per week, 30% use it less than once a week, and 70% never use it.

Question 7 - If you do not use the Contact Scotland BSL service, can you tell us the reasons for this? (Open question)

There were 50 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from four community consultation events' reports.

Do not need the service

The most prevalent theme among responses to this question was respondents who stated that they do not use the Contact Scotland BSL service, because they do not need it. Responses assigned to this theme were usually laconic. Among respondents to this theme, the majority were not BSL users, while none had responded that they were BSL users. Respondents to this theme represented a similar share of individual and organisation respondents.

"At present, I don't have a need to use it in my work or home life, but I would be happy to use it if the need arose." (Individual)

"Any engagement we have had with BSL users has included interpreters, this interpreting has not been done by Contact Scotland BSL interpreters." (Organisation)

Are not aware of the service

The next most common theme mentioned among both online consultation respondents, and event participants who do not use the Contact Scotland BSL service was that they were not aware of the service. This theme was mentioned in all reports from the consultation events. Furthermore, among respondents to the online consultation, this theme was more common among individual respondents and respondents who are not BSL users.

> "Few young people who used BSL as a primary language were aware of Contact Scotland BSL, and only those who used BSL as a second language knew that it was there." (Community Event)

Prefer other means

The next most common theme was a preference for using other means to communicate than the Contact Scotland BSL service. A few respondents said they prefer to make calls with the help of family or support workers. Others stated that they rely on other formats, including Zoom, Teams and WhatsApp messages. This theme was more common among organisation respondents than among individual respondents. As a result, this theme was most common among respondents who did not specify whether they were BSL users. However, among the individual respondents to this theme, the majority were BSL users, while none responded that they were not BSL users.

> "Finds it confusing to use, prefers her support worker (who is deaf) to make the calls for her. And they use Contact Scotland BSL." (Community Event)

Difficulty in using the service

The next prevalent theme was technical difficulties in using the service. A small number of respondents felt the service required the user to be too technologically savvy or find it confusing to use. Furthermore, a small number of respondents, and more commonly community events participants, said that they did not know how to use the service, while others felt that the service was not accessible to them. Finally, a small number of community events participants mentioned that the Contact Scotland BSL service did not work well on small screens and, hence, was difficult to use on their smartphones. This theme was mentioned in all community consultation events. Among respondents to the online consultation, this theme was more common among organisation respondents.

> "Some people said it's too small on their phone to make calls anyway as they use their iPads. Didn't know they could use the app on their iPads. Some people are older and said they are not good with technology and prefer the old way where they get information at the Deaf Club." (Community Event)

> "73% of our members don't know how to use Contact Scotland BSL." (Community Event)

Lack of confidentiality

The next frequently raised theme was confidentiality concerns from using the Contact Scotland BSL service. A small number of respondents mentioned that they were not comfortable sharing their personal information with Contact Scotland BSL interpreters. Additionally, a small number of respondents felt that the service is not appropriate for discussions involving a person's confidential or medical information. This theme was primarily mentioned in community events reports.

"A [person's profession] mentioned the issue of trust, and [they] don't feel comfortable with someone who could know [them], [their] background, etc." (Community Event)

"Not comfortable with Contact Scotland BSL because of privacy issues. I'd prefer to rely on my daughter." (Community Event)

Preference for live interpreting

A small number of respondents expressed their preference for face-to-face interpreting, in some instances due to issues with digital literacy and/or connectivity issues. Furthermore, a small number of respondents also felt that it was lacking the human touch needed, especially in crisis situations. Among respondents to the online consultation, this theme was more common among respondents who were BSL users.

"Some deaf people don't want to use an online service in their vulnerable state, but NHSGGC doesn't respect our preferences for a face-to-face interpreter. It is as though they are looking to reduce face-to-face appointments." (Organisation)

"The service is good for making phone calls, however, it is not appropriate to be used for in-depth personal. It is good for short responses/calls. Whilst using video communication, you can miss vital intricate detail, which can result in not providing accurate interpretation." (Organisation)

Question 8 - If you have stopped using the service, can you tell us the reasons for this? (Open question)

The vast majority of respondents to the online consultation did not respond to the question (left it blank), or said that it is not applicable to them. In total, only 9 respondents of the online consultation provided an answer to this question. Insights to this question are thus mainly driven by the reports summarising the views of participants of the community events. Our analysis of this question is informed by three reports summarising views discussed in community consultation events.

Poor quality of service

The main theme among those who stopped using Contact Scotland BSL was complaints about the quality of service. A small number of respondents mentioned that this was due to bad experiences with the service's interpreters, specifically citing poor social skills and lack of patience, as well as facing significant technical issues and delays when trying to use the service online. A small number of respondents noted that using the service could be stressful. Additionally, a small

number of event participants said that the Contact Scotland BSL service was sometimes incompatible for use with third parties, specifically certain companies required the caller to speak on the phone to give the company permission to talk with Contact Scotland BSL. Finally, a small number of respondents mentioned the lack of awareness of other sign languages (e.g. St Vincent's signs) from Contact Scotland BSL staff.

> "Everything seems to be online. During and after the COVID pandemic, everything became almost entirely online, which can be stressful and very tiring for our eyes. Sometimes, the screen gets frozen, which creates additional stress." (Community Event)

> "Those who stopped using Contact Scotland BSL reported being unhappy and uncomfortable with some of the BSL/English interpreters' attitudes and their ways of questioning the nature of their calls. They would prefer to be connected first before explaining why they called in the first instance." (Community Event)

Privacy concerns, lack of awareness, and preference for other options

Other reasons for stopping to use the service mentioned by respondents included privacy concerns with the service and a lack of awareness of the service's purpose and how to use it. Finally, a small number of respondents said they preferred other ways to make calls, such as with the help of family, friends, or support workers, while others preferred in-person communication.

> "It's quicker to ask my friend to help me make the calls" (Community Event)

> "BSL/English interpreters wanted to know my reasons for calling before making contact – then the number rings out. This means they know all about my personal business." (Community Event)

Question 9 - If you use the service, what could be done to improve the service for you? (Open question)

There were 10 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from three community consultation events' reports.

Extending service availability

The most frequent theme related to extending the availability of Contact Scotland BSL. The majority of the respondents who discussed this theme were organisations.

For the majority of users, this meant reducing wait times to access a BSL/ English interpreter, with multiple responses describing 'double queuing'. This also included requests from respondents to improve interpreter availability, extend Contact Scotland BSL's service hours, and broaden the range of interpreters to choose from. Although a small number of respondents were explicitly supportive of the expansion of Contact Scotland BSL to accommodate more services and appointments, a few also wanted Contact Scotland BSL to better support contact with friends and families.

"Overall, our experience of the service has been very positive – the only issue would be the waiting time to access an interpreter. So, more interpreters/more lines available would be an improvement that would be welcomed." (Organisation)

"Increasing the availability of BSL interpreters and extending the service's hours […] including evenings and weekends […]. Streamlining the process to reduce wait times for connecting with a BSL interpreter, particularly during peak demand periods." (Individual)

Increasing the quality of BSL/ English interpreters

The second most frequent theme was improving the range and quality of BSL/ English interpreters available through Contact Scotland BSL. Almost all respondents who raised this theme were individuals, and the majority were BSL users.

Specifically, respondents referred in equal measure to both improving knowledge of local Scottish signs and dialects, as well as ensuring sufficient cultural and intersectional awareness (including neurodiversity and LGBTQIA+) to effectively meet the needs of users.

Moreover, respondents were supportive of introducing mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for interpreters and training on visual frame awareness when using the service. A small number of respondents also referred to experiences with rude or hostile interpreters.

"Ensuring that all interpreters are well-trained and culturally competent in understanding the diverse needs of BSL users." (Individual)

"How many LGBTQIA+ BSL/English interpreters/translators are on their books? How many BSL/English interpreters are aware of neurodivergence / neurodiversity and know how to support a wide range of neurodivergent Deaf people?" (Community Event)

"The quality of interpreters is not as good as used to be. Now [we] have interpreters from England and Ireland, which means they do not understand my Scottish signs or I do not understand them." (Community Event)

Improving technology

Improving the technology used was identified as the fourth most common theme. This primarily included issues with image and connection quality, as well as broadening the communication options within Contact Scotland BSL and improving accessibility on different devices (issues were reported when using tablets or phones). The majority of the respondents who raised this theme were individuals and BSL users.

"Development of a more holistic service where, for example, those affected by deafness could use captions and lipread rather than the simplistic relay service at the moment." (Organisation)

"Something to improve technology […]" (Individual)

Encouraging and implementing user feedback

The final theme discussed implementing user feedback mechanisms to facilitate continuous improvement of the service and collaboratively engage with users to reflect their existing needs. The respondents who discussed this theme were individuals and BSL users.

The most popular options included an independent and anonymous complaints channel, as well as a safe space within Contact Scotland BSL to provide feedback without influence from staff members or the potential risk of being blocked from the service.

"Implementing a user feedback mechanism to gather input on interpreter quality and overall service satisfaction, emphasising continuous improvement." (Individual)

"[…] they are afraid and don't want to be blocked by the interpreter service." (Community Event)

Question 10 - If you are deafblind, and use a Braille display with the service, please tell us of your experiences. (Open question)

This question was answered by one respondent in the online consultation, with the remaining respondents either leaving the question blank or stating that it was not applicable to them. The one respondent who answered this question did not provide a relevant response and was therefore excluded from the thematic analysis.

One report from the community consultation events discussed this question, however, participants were not aware of anyone currently using the Braille display and suggested the delivery of additional training to support more people to use this service.

Question 11 - Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Contact Scotland BSL? (Open question)

There were 21 responses to this question in the online consultation. Additionally, the thematic analysis considered findings from two community consultation events' reports.

Vital service for BSL communication

The most common theme from respondents emphasised the vital role Contact Scotland BSL plays in facilitating access to essential services and information for the D/deaf BSL community. Of the respondents who discussed this theme, there was an almost equal representation of individuals and organisations, as well as BSL and non-BSL users.

Contact Scotland BSL was frequently described as a 'lifeline' for the BSL community through the independence it affords users. Respondents felt empowered by the service and suggested it closely aligned with broader goals of improved BSL awareness, inclusion, and equality of access across public services. These views were expressed equally amongst individuals and organisations.

"Supporting and fully endorsing Contact Scotland BSL is crucial to fostering a more equitable society where all individuals can engage with public and private sector organisations seamlessly, regardless of their communication preferences." (Organisation)

"From what I've been told, Contact Scotland BSL is very valuable to the deaf community, allowing them to have more accessibility." (Individual)

Promoting the continuous development of Contact Scotland BSL

The second most frequent theme emphasised the need for the continuous development of Contact Scotland BSL to ensure it remains responsive to the rapidly evolving and diverse needs of its users. This theme was supported equally amongst individuals and organisations and by a majority of BSL users.

Suggestions to enable this included sharing data with organisations to target the promotion of the service, as well as integrating feedback mechanisms for BSL users to shape updates to the service.

In addition, a small number of respondents were supportive of a governing body or independent watchdog to monitor Contact Scotland BSL, formalise the complaints procedures, and uphold quality standards of both the interpreters and technology. At present, a small number of respondents feared raising a complaint in case this was not taken seriously and caused them to be restricted or banned from using the service in future.

"Contact Scotland BSL plays a crucial role in facilitating communication for the BSL community, and it's essential to work together to enhance its effectiveness and reach." (Individual)

"It would be helpful to get regular reports from Contact Scotland BSL on local usage or have a dashboard on their webpage to allow everyone to access this information openly. This will help us identify where there is low usage, and more can be done to promote the available service." (Organisation)

Ensuring reliable access to Contact Scotland BSL

The third most frequently mentioned theme referred to a need for more reliable access to Contact Scotland BSL. The majority of respondents that referred to this theme were BSL users, and were equally divided between organisations and individuals.

This included improving wait times and ensuring good quality internet connection by those delivering the service, regardless of location. This theme was also raised and discussed in greater depth under Question 9.

"Those interpreters that work from home should have the fastest highest speed of internet for better communications instead of buffering while we have the highest speed!" (Individual)

Clarifying guidance about Contact Scotland BSL

Next, respondents requested clearer guidance about the appropriate use and purpose of Contact Scotland BSL to better inform both users and organisations. The majority of respondents who addressed this theme were organisations.

Confusion was expressed at when and how the service could be used, with examples of interpreters refusing to attend certain bookings made through Contact Scotland BSL. Suggestions included raising awareness of the service and how it operates, including what calls can and cannot be covered by the service, as well as service operating hours.

Respondents also supported greater transparency to users about all service updates to build trust and reliability.

> "It should be mandatory for public organisations to have this option clearly displayed on their website and for all staff to be aware of the service." (Organisation)

> "It is important that users feel reassured and feel confident using it, and there is scope for staff and students to improve their awareness of the service and how it operates beyond our existing BSL awareness training." (Organisation)

Raising the quality of BSL/ English interpreters

Improving the quality of interpreters was identified as the fifth most common theme. Of those who discussed this theme, the majority were individuals and BSL users.

A small number of respondents discussed the need for better-qualified interpreters, whilst others raised the need for interpreters with wider knowledge of local dialects and sign variations. This theme was also raised and discussed in greater depth under Question 9.

> "Previous feedback has also been provided […] that there may be some challenges in understanding the Sign Language interpreter who might not be local to them (dialect and sign variations)." (Organisation)

6. Summary of themes from unstructured responses

A small number of responses submitted via email did not follow the consultation's structure and did not directly answer the consultation's questions. These 'unstructured responses' commented widely on topics covered in the consultation document. Additionally, a small number of email responses and reports from consultation community events were 'partially structured', containing some sections that directly answered the consultation's questions and sections with a wider discussion of the consultation document that was not directly linked to specific questions. There were two unstructured responses to this consultation and three partially structured responses. There was no consensus amongst these responses to the consultation, however, all relevant themes identified are presented below.

Need for accountability and clear commitment to funding and monitoring the actions in the BSL National Plan 2023 – 2029

Mirroring an overarching theme often mentioned across responses to this consultation, a small number of respondents discussed the importance of clearer, direct, and more detailed language around the actions in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 to ensure there is a commitment to delivering the actions proposed and monitoring the outcomes of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. Furthermore, some community event participants expressed that there was not enough accountability and information sharing from the Scottish Government regarding the outcomes of the previous BSL National Plan 2017-2023. The same respondents felt there was limited progress in the actions put forth in the BSL National Plan 2017-2023 and, hence, were not supportive of reducing the number of actions in the new BSL National Plan 2023-2029.

> "Greater clarity in the articulation of these actions and who has responsibility for them will help with monitoring progress in future." (Organisation)

BSL National Plan 2023-2029 and the consultation are not easy to understand

A small number of respondents, mainly amongst participants in community events, mentioned they found it difficult to understand and engage with the consultation topics. Some cited having limited background information about the actions and the BSL Act. Others stressed the importance of ensuring the consultation questions translate well from BSL to English.

> "There should be a booklet or glossary for us to read before voting for each priority and action plans." (Community Event)

> "There should be a working group to look at how the questions would be translated in BSL – a bit like the National Advisory Group (NAG) but a BSL working group to monitor the translations and check if Deaf club members understand them." (Community Event)

Improvement in BSL education and training provision

Respondents in this theme discussed the need to support BSL learning provision. Various areas for improvement and suggestions were discussed, including support for early intervention, the importance of preventing language deprivation, and the need for free BSL courses for deaf and deafblind children and families. It was also mentioned that there is a shortage of BSL teachers in Scotland and that hearing professionals may not be adequately trained in BSL, while there are few opportunities for courses that would support BSL users to become BSL teachers. Respondents stressed that there may currently be bias towards hearing-led approaches over BSL teaching. Finally, it was mentioned that the current BSL National Plan 2023-2029 does not cover children and young people who may not have received appropriate BSL education provision in the past.

> "[…] language acquisition is an essential aspect of any language planning activity, and it is also essential that language deprivation in deaf and deafblind children be prevented. […] Hearing professionals who work with deaf children are typically fluent in spoken language and may have a communication bias towards spoken language. This bias may lead them to believe that spoken language is superior and more desirable, overlooking the benefits of BSL in supporting communication with Deaf and deafblind children and their families. Additionally, these hearing professionals often do not receive adequate training or education about sign languages and Deaf culture during their professional development. This lack of exposure can contribute to a lack of understanding and appreciation for BSL. […] Finally, there also needs to be provision of free BSL courses for deaf and deafblind children and their families […]" (Organisation)

Additional themes on accessibility and inclusivity

We also present some additional themes mentioned by a small number of respondents. These included: (i) need for supporting improvements in the justice system for BSL users, (ii) the promotion of deaf culture through a 'Deaf Gain' approach, recognising what is gained through the use of BSL (such as deaf culture, community, and history), and (iii) the importance of understanding that BSL is used by different groups who may have different experiences with the language (e.g. deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing).

> "The group is content with the action but will want to also continue to develop a broader range of actions that would support improvements in the justice system for BSL users." (Organisation)

> "In 2014, the term 'Deaf Gain' was coined to shift the narrative from a medical model of deafness essentially defined by loss, to emphasising the advantages of what is gained such as deaf culture, community, history and sign languages." (Organisation)

7. Conclusion

As part of its commitment to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit, and learn, the Scottish Government has drafted a renewed BSL National Plan for 2023 to 2029. The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 focuses on six key priority areas: (i) BSL Data Strategy, (ii) BSL Workforce, (iii) Supporting Deaf Children, Young People and their families, (iv) BSL Accessibility, (v) the Promotion of the Heritage and Culture of BSL, and (vi) Social Care and Wellbeing.

Between 7 July 2023 and 3 September 2023, the Scottish Government launched a consultation gathering the views of stakeholders on the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029 to inform the final publication in autumn 2023. Community consultation events were also held between 30 June 2023 and 3 September 2023 in addition to the consultation to allow BSL users to participate in a two-way dialogue in their own language and in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way to express their views.

Its purpose was to better understand what actions people, communities and organisations would like to see under each key priority, as well as views on the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 overall. Feedback on the Contact Scotland BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service was also gathered to inform future improvements.

The consultation posed a total of 24 questions, including 10 closed questions (e.g., receiving yes/ no/ don't know responses) and 14 open-text questions (receiving free text responses). A total of 80 responses were received, in addition to 40 community consultation events. Amongst consultation respondents, 36% were BSL users, 50% were not BSL users, and 14% preferred not to say. Responses were received from individuals, local councils, academic institutions, public body representatives (including executive agencies, NDPBs, NHS, etc.), third-sector service delivery organisations, and organisations representing the deaf, deafblind, and BSL communities.

Alma Economics was commissioned by the Scottish Government to analyse all responses. Descriptive analysis was conducted on the closed-format questions, and thematic analysis was used to synthesise themes raised in the open-text questions and community consultation event reports.

Following the thematic analysis, 5 recurring themes were identified across consultation responses and community events. A brief summary of these themes is presented below; for a more detailed description, please refer to the executive summary.

Focus on clear, tangible, and measurable actions

Respondents discussed the need for more clear, tangible, and measurable actions to be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. This included more detailed and clearly articulated actions for each key priority, as well as clarification on how each action will be monitored and who will be responsible. Respondents were ultimately interested in a BSL National Plan 2023-2029 which will explicitly commit the Scottish Government to delivering on its promises.

Continuous collaboration with BSL users

Respondents emphasised the importance of continuous collaboration with the BSL community throughout the development and implementation of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. This was expressed as a requirement to ensure that actions remain meaningful, beneficial, and relevant to all stakeholders. Respondents were wary of tokenistic or 'tick-box' actions, recommending continuous dialogue with the community, opportunities for feedback over the duration of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, and actively seeking diverse opinions.

Equal opportunity and inclusion

Equal access, opportunity, representation, and inclusion for all BSL users was understood as a fundamental right for Scotland's people. This included access to essential services (such as healthcare, social care, mental health services, and transport), BSL education for BSL users and their families from the point of need, and access to activities (such as sports, entertainment, or the news) which were typically considered low priorities for the community.

Promote BSL as a language and culture

Promoting BSL as both a language and a rich culture was particularly important across the consultation and community events. Respondents did not want BSL to be reduced to language alone and described their rich, vibrant, and unique culture, which they believed should be shared amongst the wider population. This holistic approach would both improve awareness of the BSL community amongst the wider population and become a key source of pride and empowerment for the community.

Inclusion of the whole D/deaf community

Respondents were concerned that certain groups within the wider D/deaf community would be overlooked by the BSL National Plan 2023-2029. To address this, respondents suggested using an intersectional approach to better understand the diverse preferences, needs and experiences of the whole D/deaf community and considering differences across age, geographical region, gender, sexual orientation, and other protected characters. All actions delivered as part of the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 should reflect this nuance to ensure that greater accessibility and awareness will benefit the community as a whole.

Appendix 1: Respondent types

Note: Figures/percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Question: Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

The table shows that this question received a total of 80 respondents. Of these, 48 respondents (or 60% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Individual', and 32 respondents (or 40%) selected the option 'Organisation'.

Respondent type	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Individual	48	60%
Organisation	32	40%
All respondents	**80**	**100%**

Question: If you are responding as an individual, please tell us whether you are a BSL user?

The table shows that 21 respondents (or 36% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 29 respondents (or 50%) selected the option 'No – I am not a BSL user', and 8 respondents (or 14%) selected the option 'I prefer not to say'. Please note that although this question was intended for 'Individual' respondents only, it was also answered by 10 'Organisation' representatives.

Respondent type	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Yes - I am a BSL user	21	36%
No - I am not a BSL user	29	50%
I prefer not to say	8	14%
All respondents	**58**	**100%**

Question: If you are responding as an organisation, please select which of the following most closely describes your organisation type?

The table shows that 12 respondents (or 30% of total respondents to this question) represented 'Local Government', 9 respondents (or 23%) represented a 'Third Sector/ Deaf Organisation', 6 respondents (or 15%) represented a 'Public Body, including Executive Agencies, NDPBs, NHS etc.', 6 respondents (or 15%) selected 'Other', 5 respondents (or 13%) represented 'Academic/research', and 2 respondents (or 5%) selected 'Representative Body for Professionals'. Please note that although this question was intended for 'Organisation' respondents only, it was also answered by 8 'Individual' respondents.

Organisation type	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Local Government	12	30%
Third Sector/Deaf Organisation	9	23%
Public Body, including Executive Agencies, NDPBs, NHS etc.	6	15%
Other	6	15%
Academic/research	5	13%
Representative Body for Professionals	2	5%
All respondents	**40**	**100%**

Question: What is your organisation?

35 organisations responded to this question. In alphabetical order, these are: 'Aberdeen City Council', 'Aberdeenshire Council', 'British Deaf Association (BDA) Scotland', 'British Sign Language Justice Advisory Group', 'Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)', 'Deaf Action', 'Deafblind Scotland', 'Deaf Services Lanarkshire', 'Dumfries and Galloway Council', 'Dundee City Council', 'Highland Deaf Education Service', 'Historic Environment Scotland', 'Language and Intercultural Studies: Heriot-Watt University', 'LGBT Health and Wellbeing', 'National Deaf Children's Society', 'New College Lanarkshire', 'NHS Fife', 'NHS Forth Valley', 'NHS Highland', 'Perth & Kinross Council', 'Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh', 'Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership', 'RNID', 'Scottish Borders Council', 'Scottish Collaborative of Sign Language Interpreters SCOLSI', 'Scottish Qualifications Authority', 'Stirling Council', 'The City of Edinburgh Council', 'The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)', 'The Scottish Register', 'University of Aberdeen', 'University of Edinburgh', 'University of the Highlands and Islands', 'West Dunbartonshire Council', and 'West Lothian College'.

Appendix 2:
Tables with breakdown of responses

Note: Figures/percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Question 1.1a: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Data on BSL?

The table shows that this question received a total of 76 responses. Of these, 66 respondents (or 87% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 1%) selected the option 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 9 respondents (or 12%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	66	87%
Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	1	1%
Don't know	9	12%
All respondents	**76**	**100%**

Question 1.1b: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: BSL Workforce?

The table shows that this question received a total of 75 responses. Of these, 69 respondents (or 92% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 1%) selected the option 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 5 respondents (or 7%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	69	92%
Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	1	1%
Don't know	5	7%
All respondents	**75**	**100%**

Question 1.1c: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Supporting deaf children, young people and their families?

The table shows that this question received a total of 76 responses. Of these, 72 respondents (or 95% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 1%) selected the option 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 3 respondents (or 4%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	72	95%
Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	1	1%
Don't know	3	4%
All respondents	**76**	**100%**

Question 1.1d: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: BSL accessibility?

The table shows that this question received a total of 75 responses. Of these, 72 respondents (or 96% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 1%) selected the option 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 3%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	72	96%
Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	1	1%
Don't know	2	3%
All respondents	**75**	**100%**

Question 1.1e: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Promotion of the heritage and culture of BSL?

The table shows that this question received a total of 74 responses. Of these, 66 respondents (or 89% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 2 respondents (or 3%) selected the option 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 6 respondents (or 8%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	66	89%
Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	2	3%
Don't know	6	8%
All respondents	**74**	**100%**

Question 1.1f: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Social care and wellbeing?

The table shows that this question received a total of 76 responses. Of these, 75 respondents (or 99% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 1%) selected the option 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	75	99%
Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	1	1%
Don't know	0	0%
All respondents	**76**	**100%**

Question 2.1: Are there any actions that should be revised in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029?

The table shows that this question received a total of 73 responses. Of these, 37 respondents (or 51% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Yes', 16 respondents (or 22%) selected the option 'No', and 20 respondents (or 27%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Yes	37	51%
No	16	22%
Don't know	20	27%
All respondents	**73**	**100%**

Question 3.1: Are there any additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029?

The table shows that this question received a total of 72 responses. Of these, 48 respondents (or 67% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Yes', 3 respondents (or 4%) selected the option 'No', and 21 respondents (or 29%) selected the option 'Don't know'.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Yes	48	67%
No	3	4%
Don't know	21	29%
All respondents	**72**	**100%**

Question 5: Are you aware of the Contact Scotland BSL service?

The table shows that this question received a total of 80 responses. Of these, 59 respondents (or 74% of total respondents to this question) selected the option 'Yes', 14 respondents (or 18%) selected the option 'No', and 7 respondents (or 9%) did not answer this question.

Responses	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Yes	59	74%
No	14	18%
All respondents	**73**	**100%**

Question 6: How often do you typically use the Contact Scotland BSL service?

The table shows that this question received a total of 70 responses. Of these, 2 respondents (or 3% of total respondents to this question) selected the option '2-6 times a week', 26 respondents (or 37%) selected the option 'Less than once a week', and 24 respondents (or 60%) selected the option 'Never'.

	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
2-6 times a week	2	3%
Less than once a week	26	37%
Never	42	60%
All respondents	**70**	**100%**

Appendix 3: Tables with breakdown of responses across respondent types

Note: Figures/percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Question 1.1a: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Data on BSL?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 76 total responses to this question. Of the 47 total 'Individual' respondents, 39 respondents (or 83% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 2%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 7 respondents (or 15%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total 'Organisation' respondents, 27 respondents (or 93% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 7%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Individual	39 (83%)	1 (2%)	7 (15%)	47
Organisation	27 (93%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	29
All respondents	**66 (87%)**	**1 (1%)**	**9 (12%)**	**76**

Question 1.1b: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: BSL Workforce?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 75 total responses to this question. Of the 46 total 'Individual' respondents, 41 respondents (or 89% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 2%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 4 respondents (or 9%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total 'Organisation' respondents, 28 respondents (or 97% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 3%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Individual	41 (89%)	1 (2%)	4 (9%)	46
Organisation	28 (97%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	29
All respondents	**69 (92%)**	**1 (1%)**	**5 (7%)**	**75**

Question 1.1c: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Supporting deaf children, young people and their families?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 76 total responses to this question. Of the 47 total 'Individual' respondents, 46 respondents (or 98% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 2%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total 'Organisation' respondents, 26 respondents (or 90% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 3 respondents (or 10%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Individual	46 (98%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	47
Organisation	26 (90%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	29
All respondents	**72 (95%)**	**1 (1%)**	**3 (4%)**	**76**

Question 1.1d: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: BSL accessibility?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 75 total responses to this question. Of the 46 total 'Individual' respondents, 43 respondents (or 93% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 2%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 4%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total 'Organisation' respondents, 29 respondents (or 100%

of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and no respondents selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' or 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Individual	43 (93%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	46
Organisation	29 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	29
All respondents	72 (96%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	75

Question 1.1e: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Promotion of the heritage and culture of BSL?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 74 total responses to this question. Of the 46 total 'Individual' respondents, 39 respondents (or 85% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 2 respondents (or 4%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 5 respondents (or 11%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 28 total 'Organisation' respondents, 27 respondents (or 96% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 4%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Individual	39 (85%)	2 (4%)	5 (11%)	46
Organisation	27 (96%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	28
All respondents	66 (89%)	2 (3%)	6 (8%)	74

Question 1.1f: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Social care and wellbeing?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 76 total responses to this question. Of the 47 total 'Individual' respondents, 46 respondents (or 98% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' 1 respondent (or 2%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total 'Organisation' respondents, 29 respondents (or 100% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and no respondents selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' or 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Individual	46 (98%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	47
Organisation	29 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	29
All respondents	**75 (99%)**	**1 (1%)**	**0 (0%)**	**76**

Question 2.1: Are there any actions that should be revised in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 73 total responses to this question. Of the 46 total 'Individual' respondents, 20 respondents (or 43% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Yes', 9 respondents (or 20%) selected 'No', and 17 respondents (or 37%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 27 total 'Organisation' respondents, 17 respondents (or 63% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Yes', 7 respondents (or 23%) selected 'No', and 3 respondents (or 11%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Individual	20 (43%)	9 (20%)	17 (37%)	46
Organisation	17 (63%)	7 (26%)	3 (11%)	27
All respondents	**37 (51%)**	**16 (22%)**	**20 (27%)**	**73**

Question 3.1: Are there any additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 72 total responses to this question. Of the 45 total 'Individual' respondents, 27 respondents (or 60% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Yes', 1 respondent (or 2%) selected 'No', and 17 respondents (or 38%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 27 total 'Organisation' respondents, 21 respondents (or 78% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Yes', 2 respondents (or 7%) selected 'No', and 4 respondents (or 15%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Individual	27 (60%)	1 (2%)	17 (38%)	45
Organisation	21 (78%)	2 (7%)	4 (15%)	27
All respondents	**48 (67%)**	**3 (4%)**	**21 (29%)**	**72**

Question 5: Are you aware of the Contact Scotland BSL service?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 73 total responses to this question. Of the 48 total 'Individual' respondents, 34 respondents (or 71% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected 'Yes', and 14 respondents (or 29%) selected 'No'. Of the 25 total 'Organisation' respondents, 25 respondents (or 100% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected 'Yes', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'No'.

Respondent type	Yes	No	Total
Individual	34 (71%)	14 (29%)	48
Organisation	25 (100%)	0 (0%)	25
All respondents	**59 (81%)**	**14 (19%)**	**73**

Question 6: How often do you typically use the Contact Scotland BSL service?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 70 total responses to this question. Of the 48 total 'Individual' respondents, 2 respondents (or 4% of all 'Individual' respondents) selected '2-6 times a week', 11 respondents (or 23%) selected 'Less than once a week', and 35 respondents (or 73%) selected 'Never'. Of the 22 total 'Organisation' respondents, 0 respondents (or 0% of all 'Organisation' respondents) selected '2-6 times a week', 15 respondents (or 68%) selected 'Less than once a week', and 7 respondents (or 32%) selected 'Never'.

Respondent type	2-6 times a week	Less than once a week	Never	Total
Individual	2 (4%)	11 (23%)	35 (73%)	48
Organisation	0 (0%)	15 (68%)	7 (32%)	22
All respondents	**2 (3%)**	**26 (37%)**	**42 (60%)**	**70**

Appendix 4: Tables with breakdown of responses across other respondent types

Note: Figures/percentages may not sum to total due to rounding.

Question 1.1a: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Data on BSL?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 57 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 17 respondents (or 85% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 5%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 10%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 25 respondents (or 86% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 4 respondents (or 14%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 7 respondents (or 88% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	17 (85%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	25 (86%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)	29
I prefer not to say	7 (88%)	0 (0%)	1 (12%)	8
All respondents	**49 (86%)**	**1 (2%)**	**7 (12%)**	**57**

Question 1.1b: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: BSL Workforce?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 56 total responses to this question. Of the 19 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 17 respondents (or 89% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or

0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 11%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 27 respondents (or 93% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 7%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 7 respondents (or 88% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	17 (89%)	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	19
No – I am not a BSL user	27 (93%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	29
I prefer not to say	7 (88%)	1 (12%)	0 (0%)	8
All respondents	**51 (91%)**	**1 (2%)**	**4 (7%)**	**56**

Question 1.1c: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Supporting deaf children, young people and their families?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 57 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 20 respondents (or 100% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and no respondents selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' or 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 28 respondents (or 97% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 3%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 7 respondents (or 88% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	20 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	28 (97%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	29
I prefer not to say	7 (88%)	1 (12%)	0 (0%)	8
All respondents	**55 (96%)**	**1 (2%)**	**1 (2%)**	**57**

Question 1.1d: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: BSL accessibility?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 56 total responses to this question. Of the 19 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 19 respondents (or 100% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and no respondents selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' or 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 28 respondents (or 97% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 3%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 6 respondents (or 75% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	19 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19
No – I am not a BSL user	28 (97%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	29
I prefer not to say	6 (75%)	1 (12%)	1 (12%)	8
All respondents	**53 (95%)**	**1 (2%)**	**2 (4%)**	**56**

Question 1.1e: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Promotion of the heritage and culture of BSL?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 56 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 18 respondents (or 90% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 10%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 25 respondents (or 86% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 2 respondents (or 7%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 2 respondents (or 7%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 7 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 6 respondents (or 86% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 0 respondent (or 0%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 1 respondent (or 14%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	18 (90%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	25 (86%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	29
I prefer not to say	6 (86%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	7
All respondents	**49 (88%)**	**2 (4%)**	**5 (9%)**	**56**

Question 1.1f: What do you think about the key priority within the draft BSL National Plan 2023-2029: Social care and wellbeing?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 57 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 20 respondents (or 100% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and no respondents selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' or 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 29 respondents (or 100% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user'

respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and no respondents selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029' or 'Don't know'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 7 respondents (or 88% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Priority should be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Priority should not be included in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	20 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	29 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	29
I prefer not to say	7 (88%)	1 (12%)	0 (0%)	8
All respondents	**56 (98%)**	**1 (2%)**	**0 (0%)**	**57**

Question 2.1: Are there any actions that should be revised in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 55 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 14 respondents (or 70% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Yes', 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'No', and 6 respondents (or 30%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 28 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 15 respondents (or 54% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Yes', 3 respondents (or 11%) selected 'No', and 10 respondents (or 36%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 7 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 3 respondents (or 43% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Yes', 0 respondent (or 0%) selected 'No', and 4 respondents (or 57%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	14 (70%)	0 (0%)	6 (30%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	15 (54%)	3 (11%)	10 (36%)	28
I prefer not to say	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	4 (57%)	7
All respondents	**32 (58%)**	**3 (5%)**	**20 (36%)**	**55**

Question 3.1: Are there any additional actions that should be considered for inclusion in the BSL National Plan 2023-2029?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 58 total responses to this question. Of the 21 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 16 respondents (or 76% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Yes', 4 respondents (or 19%) selected 'No', and 1 respondent (or 5%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 29 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 22 respondents (or 76% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Yes', 6 respondents (or 21%) selected 'No', and 1 respondent (or 3%) selected 'Don't know'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 4 respondents (or 50% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Yes', 4 respondent (or 50%) selected 'No', and 0 respondents (or 0%) selected 'Don't know'.

Respondent type	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	16 (76%)	4 (19%)	1 (5%)	21
No – I am not a BSL user	22 (76%)	6 (21%)	1 (3%)	29
I prefer not to say	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)	8
All respondents	**42 (72%)**	**14 (24%)**	**2 (3%)**	**58**

Question 5: Are you aware of the Contact Scotland BSL service?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 56 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 16 respondents (or 80% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Yes', and 4 respondents (or 20%) selected 'No'. Of the 28 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 22 respondents (or 79% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected 'Yes', and 6 respondents (or 21%) selected 'No'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 4 respondents (or 50% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected 'Yes', 4 respondent (or 50%) selected 'No'.

Respondent type	Yes	No	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	22 (79%)	6 (21%)	28
I prefer not to say	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	8
All respondents	**42 (75%)**	**14 (25%)**	**56**

Question 6: How often do you typically use the Contact Scotland BSL service?

The table shows the breakdown across respondent types for the 55 total responses to this question. Of the 20 total respondents that selected 'Yes – I am a BSL user', 2 respondents (or 10% of all 'Yes – I am a BSL user' respondents) selected '2-6 times a week', 8 respondents (or 40%) selected 'Less than once a week', and 10 respondents (or 50%) selected 'Never'. Of the 27 total respondents that selected 'No – I am not a BSL user', 0 respondents (or 0% of all 'No – I am not a BSL user' respondents) selected '2-6 times a week', 8 respondents (or 30%) selected 'Less than once a week', and 19 respondents (or 70%) selected 'Never'. Of the 8 total respondents that selected 'I prefer not to say', 0 respondents (or 0% of all 'I prefer not to say' respondents) selected '2-6 times a week', 1 respondent (or 12%) selected 'Less than once a week', and 7 respondents (or 88%) selected 'Never'.

Respondent type	2-6 times a week	Less than once a week	Never	Total
Yes – I am a BSL user	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	10 (50%)	20
No – I am not a BSL user	0 (0%)	8 (30%)	19 (70%)	27
I prefer not to say	0 (0%)	1 (12%)	7 (88%)	8
All respondents	**2 (4%)**	**17 (31%)**	**36 (65%)**	**55**

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG