

British Sign Language Bill

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Explanatory notes to the Bill, prepared by the Department for Work and Pensions with the consent of Rosie Cooper, the member in charge of the Bill, are published separately as Bill 33-EN.

British Sign Language Bill

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B I L L

TO

Declare British Sign Language (BSL) an official language of the United Kingdom; to provide for a British Sign Language Council to promote and advise on the use of BSL; to establish principles for the use of BSL in public services; to require public bodies to have regard to those principles and to guidance issued by the Council; and for connected purposes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

Declaration recognising British Sign Language

1 Recognition of British Sign Language

- (1) British Sign Language is recognised as a language of England, Wales and Scotland.
- (2) Subsection (1) does not affect the operation of any enactment or rule of law. 5
- (3) But see sections 2 and 3 (which, in connection with the recognition of British Sign Language by subsection (1), impose duties on the Secretary of State relating to the promotion and facilitation of the use of British Sign Language).
- (4) In this section, “enactment” includes an enactment comprised in, or in an instrument made under, an Act of the Scottish Parliament. 10

Duties relating to the promotion and facilitation of British Sign Language

2 Duty of Secretary of State to report on British Sign Language

- (1) The Secretary of State must prepare and publish a British Sign Language report for each reporting period.
- (2) A British Sign Language report is a report describing what each relevant government department has done to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in its communications with the public. 15

- (3) For this purpose a relevant government department’s communications with the public include in particular –
- (a) any public announcement which it makes about policy or about changes to the law,
 - (b) the publication by it of any plan, strategy, consultation document or consultation response, or any explanatory or supporting materials, and 5
 - (c) its use of press conferences, social media or a government website to publicise any of its activities or policies,
- but do not include communications with individual members of the public, or any other communications which the relevant government department does not intend to be shared with the public at large. 10
- (4) In preparing a British Sign Language report, the Secretary of State must –
- (a) collect information from each relevant government department about the matters to be covered by the report, and
 - (b) set out in full or summarise that information in the report. 15
- (5) The Secretary of State must not collect, or include in a British Sign Language report, information about any communication made by a relevant government department so far as that communication –
- (a) relates only to Scotland and does not relate to reserved matters (within the meaning of the Scotland Act 1998); 20
 - (b) relates only to Wales and does not relate to reserved matters (within the meaning of the Government of Wales Act 2006).
- (6) The Secretary of State must publish each British Sign Language report no more than three months after the end of the reporting period to which it relates.
- (7) In this section “reporting period” means – 25
- (a) in respect of the first British Sign Language report, the period beginning with the day on which this section comes into force and ending with 30 April 2023;
 - (b) in respect of each subsequent British Sign Language report, the period (being not longer than three years) beginning on the day after the previous reporting period ended and ending on such date as the Secretary of State decides. 30
- (8) In this section and section 3, “relevant government department” means a United Kingdom ministerial government department listed in the Schedule.
- (9) The Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument amend the list in the Schedule so as to add, remove or vary an entry in consequence of – 35
- (a) a change to the name of a United Kingdom ministerial government department, or
 - (b) any change to the way in which the United Kingdom ministerial government departments are organised. 40
- (10) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (9) is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

3 Guidance on use of British Sign Language

- (1) The Secretary of State must issue guidance, or arrange for guidance to be issued, about the promotion and facilitation of the use of British Sign Language.
- (2) Guidance under this section may for example include—
 - (a) advice for relevant government departments on providing information to the Secretary of State in accordance with section 2(4),
 - (b) advice on best practice for communicating with British Sign Language users (both when interacting with individuals and when communicating with the public at large), and
 - (c) case studies to illustrate the value of providing British Sign Language interpretation in communications with the public.
- (3) Guidance under this section must not include advice or other material which—
 - (a) relates only to Scotland and does not relate to reserved matters (within the meaning of the Scotland Act 1998);
 - (b) relates only to Wales and does not relate to reserved matters (within the meaning of the Government of Wales Act 2006).
- (4) The Secretary of State must arrange for any guidance issued under this section to be published.

General

4 Extent, commencement and short title

- (1) This Act extends to England and Wales and Scotland.
- (2) This section comes into force on the day on which this Act is passed.
- (3) Sections 1 and 2 and the Schedule come into force at the end of the period of two months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.
- (4) Section 3 comes into force on such day as the Secretary of State appoints by regulations made by statutory instrument.
- (5) This Act may be cited as the British Sign Language Act 2022.

SCHEDULE

Section 2

RELEVANT GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

1	Attorney General’s Office.	
2	Cabinet Office.	
3	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.	5
4	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.	
5	Department for Education.	
6	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.	
7	Department for International Trade.	
8	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.	10
9	Department for Transport.	
10	Department for Work and Pensions.	
11	Department of Health and Social Care.	
12	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.	
13	Her Majesty’s Treasury.	15
14	Home Office.	
15	Ministry of Defence.	
16	Ministry of Justice.	
17	Office of the Leader of the House of Commons.	
18	Office of the Leader of the House of Lords.	20
19	Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland.	
20	Office of the Secretary of State for Wales.	

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Presented by Rosie Cooper

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