



The Open  
University

**The Open University**  
**British Sign Language Action Plan 2018-2024**

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## SECTION 1

### 1.1 Background

The Open University welcomes the opportunity to respond to the requirement within the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 for all public bodies, including colleges and universities<sup>1</sup>, to publish their own BSL plans by the end of the October 2018, a year after the publication of Scotland's first [British Sign Language \(BSL\) National Plan](#).

The BSL National Plan was published on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2017 following extensive engagement with Deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. The Plan sets out Scotland's ambition to be the best place in the world for BSL users<sup>2</sup> to live, work and visit. It is framed around ten long-term goals covering early years and education; training and work; health; culture and the arts; transport; justice and democracy.

### 1.2 Introduction

Social justice and equality of opportunity are at the heart of everything The Open University does and widening access to higher education is the ambition on which it was founded. The Open University is committed to extending opportunities for educational success to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

The Open University is proud to be the only university that operates across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The teaching of OU students resident in Scotland is funded by the Scottish Funding Council but we are also able to bring to Scotland significant benefits derived from being part of the UK's largest higher education institution. The size and scale of the University allows it to offer a broader curriculum, a more diverse range of staff and students, wider access to educational innovation and greater investment in systems and platforms which can improve the student experience and our efficiency.

As a distance learning provider, the experience, challenges and successes of our BSL students may differ from those of a traditional campus-based institution and we will ensure the support we offer recognises and responds to our students' particular requirements. The OU's Student Accessibility Policy is published on our website: <https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/accessibility/files/42/student-accessibility-policy.pdf>

Information on the additional support currently available for students with restricted hearing and guidance on how to get this support is available via on the OU website: <https://help.open.ac.uk/deaf-or-hard-of-hearing>.

Due to its unique nature The Open University has also developed its own website accessibility guidelines: <http://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/strategy-and-policies/policies-and-statements/website-accessibility-open-university>

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<sup>1</sup> A post-16 education body (as defined by section 35(1) of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. The Open University in Scotland is included as one of the 19 higher education institutions in Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Wherever we refer to BSL users we mean Deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

The Open University is committed to supporting the implementation of the BSL National Plan, ensuring we meet our BSL obligations and providing an inclusive service to our students. We are grateful for the support and training provided by deafscotland, the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 Partners and the FE/HE Participation Officer at Deaf Action.

### **1.3 Name and contact details of lead officer**

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### **1.4 Where to find the BSL version of this plan**

The BSL version of this plan is available on both The Open University in Scotland website: [www.open.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.open.ac.uk/scotland) and The Open University's Equality and Diversity website: [www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity](http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity)

## SECTION 2: ACTIONS

The BSL National Plan is framed under ten long-term goals which have been co-produced with BSL users across Scotland. We have structured our BSL plan under the same long-term goals where they are relevant.

### 2.1: Across all our services

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is *“Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users”*



#### By 2024, we will:

- analyse existing evidence we have about students and prospective students who use BSL in The Open University; identify and fill key information gaps so that we can establish baselines and measure our progress
- improve information and services for students and prospective students who use BSL
- investigate how we can make our website more accessible to BSL users
- promote the use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#), which allows BSL users to contact public and related sector services and for these services to contact them. With advances in technology and specifically software, Deafblind BSL users whose first language is BSL, can now also access the service
- signpost staff, including associate lecturers, who work with BSL users to appropriate BSL awareness training, and enable them to take up such training
- investigate the development of an online module on BSL awareness which could be made publicly available for free on the University’s [OpenLearn](#) platform.

### 2.2: Post-School Education

We share the long-term goal for post- school education set out in the BSL National Plan, which is *“BSL users will be able to maximise their potential at school, will be supported to transition to post-school education if they wish to do so, and will receive the support they need to do well in their chosen subject(s)”*



#### By 2024, we will:

- provide accessible information about what BSL users can expect from The Open University
- improve support throughout the student journey for students who use BSL
- take on board guidance produced by the Scottish Funding Council and others to ensure that staff across the University are aware of their responsibilities towards BSL users, and that students who use BSL know what to expect
- invite continuous feedback from students/prospective students and staff who use BSL over the coming year/18 months after adopting this plan
- make use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#) to provide assistance to students who use BSL

- review this plan after the National Progress Report due October 2020.

### 2.3: Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare

The Open University's model of supported open learning is particularly suitable for carers who can study from home and fit their learning around their caring commitments. We can, and do, make special exam arrangements for those students who would find difficulty in attending an exam centre.



### 2.4: School Education

The Open University in Scotland's [Young Applicants in Schools Scheme](#) (YASS) allows students in the final year of secondary school to experience higher education level study in school alongside their other subjects and enhance their career prospects. Students can choose from a range of high quality modules at SCQF Level 7 and have access to a subject which may not be available in their school.



#### By 2024, we will:

- provide accessible information about what BSL users can expect from The Open University
- improve support for YASS students and prospective YASS students who use BSL

### 2.5: Training, Work and Social Security

We share the long-term goal for training, work and social security set out in the BSL National Plan, which is *“BSL users will be supported to develop the skills they need to become valued members of the Scottish workforce, so that they can fulfil their potential, and improve Scotland’s economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career”*



The Open University's [Careers and Employability Services](#) provide professional careers advisers to support its students' career choices and career planning. A series of employability related Badged Open Courses (BOCs) are publicly available for free on the OU's OpenLearn website at:

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-business/gain-badge-and-further-your-career>

There are a wide range of [employment opportunities](#) at The Open University including support, executive positions and research jobs among many other types of roles. We promote diversity in employment and welcome applications from all sections of the community. Discrimination arising from individual characteristics and circumstances is not only unlawful, but a waste of talent and a denial of opportunity, preventing individuals, organisations and societies from achieving their growth potential.

#### By 2024, we will:

- raise awareness of the UK Government's 'Access to Work' scheme for students who use BSL towards the end of their qualification so that they can benefit from the support it provides
- improve our careers and employability services for students and prospective students who use BSL

## 2.6: Health (including social care), Mental Health and Wellbeing

We share the long-term goal for health, mental health and wellbeing set out in the BSL National Plan, which is *“BSL users will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make informed choices at every stage of their lives”*



### By 2024, we will:

- take steps to ensure that mental health support within the University is fully accessible to students and staff who use BSL, or that students and staff using BSL are supported to access equivalent support outside the University".

## 2.7: Culture and the Arts

We share the long-term goal for culture and the arts set out in the BSL National Plan, which is *“BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and Deaf Culture with the people of Scotland”*



As part of its cultural engagement programme, The Open University in Scotland supports a number of lectures and events at book festivals, arts festivals and science festivals across Scotland.

### By 2024, we will:

- take action to ensure that cultural engagement activities offered in partnership with the University are accessible to BSL users.

## 2.8: Justice

We share the long-term goal for justice set out in the BSL National Plan, which is *“BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland”*



The Open University has developed a suite of free badged online courses on the law in Scotland. The courses – [The Scottish Parliament and law-making](#), [Scottish courts and the law](#), [Legal skills and debates in Scotland](#), and coming soon [Law and change: Scottish legal heroes](#) - are intended to aid public understanding of the law and legal institutions. These free course are released under a Creative Commons licence and therefore are available to interested organisations to be translated into BSL and made available on the [OpenLearn Create](#) platform.

## **SECTION 3:**

### **What happens next?**

This is The Open University's first British Sign Language plan. Like many colleges and universities, we do not have significant numbers of BSL students with whom we have been able to consult in a meaningful way, particularly within the timescales laid down in legislation. We have adapted the template provided by the Scottish Government Equality Unit.

The Open University is committed to gathering on-going feedback on our BSL plan over the coming 18 months with a view to publishing a refreshed plan after the national progress report, due in October 2020.

Please contact either [Kate Signorini](#), Depute Director (Strategy, Planning and Resources) or [Jiten Patel](#), Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion [see paragraph 1.3 for contact details] if you wish to be involved as we further develop the actions in our plan.