

The State Hospital Board for Scotland

British Sign Language (BSL) Plan

2025 - 2030



Introduction

The Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for British Sign Language (BSL) users* to live, work and visit. This means that people whose first or preferred language is BSL will be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens, and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public bodies in Scotland to publish plans every six years, showing how they will promote, and facilitate the promotion of the use and understanding BSL in Scotland. These plans will take account of local circumstances and consider how best to respond to BSL users' needs within local communities, organisations or services.

This is our second State Hospital BSL Local Plan.

The legislation states that local BSL Action Plans should 'try to achieve consistency' with the ten long-term goals described within the BSL National Plan ([BSL National Plan](#)) however recognises that "local plans will be tailored to local circumstances / opportunities / priorities".

Our Plan follows the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, published 6 November 2023, which was developed through extensive engagement with D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. Our local Plan is framed around the same long-term goals as the national plan.

BSL is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, vocabulary and dialects. Many deaf people define BSL as their first or preferred language, including those who receive the language in a tactile form (e.g. Braille) due to sight loss (Scottish Government, 2017).

** 'BSL users within this Action Plan refers to D/deaf (deaf/hard of hearing) 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.*

Context

The State Hospital (TSH) provides care and treatment for a maximum of 140 male patients who are admitted to the Hospital under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act, 2015. The average length of stay is 4 years and average age is 39 years, however some patients remain in the care of TSH for significantly shorter/longer periods, some of whom are likely to experience residual hearing loss later in life.

The Hospital does not currently have any patients who are deaf however several patients require to use hearing aids to aid communication.

Although TSH shares the same values, aims and challenges as the rest of NHSScotland, the Hospital is unique as it has the dual responsibility of caring for detained patients with complex needs, as well as protecting them, the public and staff from harm.

Guidance produced by Scottish Government and the Scottish Council on Deafness highlights the need for regional NHS Boards to consider where service delivery interacts with Special NHS Boards / other external service providers.

As TSH is the only Scottish high secure forensic mental health setting, patients from regional NHSScotland Boards are accommodated within the Hospital. In addition to accessing acute NHS services, TSH uses the services of the majority of Special NHS Boards, including NHS 24, Scottish Ambulance Service, as part of the wider aspect of providing care and treatment. TSH collaborates with Forensic Network partners, primarily mental health services within NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Lothian and NHS Tayside through the Care Programme Approach process to transfer patients to step-down services in these areas.

The local BSL Action Plan should also consider the role of partner organisations which provide services to TSH patients locally as part of an integrated approach to care and treatment, including Pharmacy, GP, Advocacy, Dentistry and a range of AHP services (Physiotherapy, Speech & Language Therapy, Podiatry) and South Lanarkshire Social Work colleagues.

This complex interface creates significant challenges in responding to the guidance relating to partnership working with a wide range and large number of partner care organisations.

The State Hospital's Board (the Board) is committed to ensuring that every TSH patient is enabled to equally access and meaningfully engage in all elements of care and treatment. The Board therefore acknowledge the need to support the use of BSL (including tactile form) and understand the challenges of ensuring that systems, processes and skills remain current, despite the infrequency of engaging with patient / visitors / Named Persons who present as BSL users.

As TSH is the only high secure hospital in Scotland, arrangements are made, on occasion, to transfer patients who require specialist input to high secure services in England. Consideration would be given to this approach for patients who are BSL users, through direct liaison with these services to seek further guidance and support or to consider transfer for those patients whose needs could be more effectively met by being cared for at Rampton Hospital, the national high secure deaf service for England and Wales.

In recognition of the small number of patients within its care, TSH has adopted a balanced and proportionate response to the legislation, based on actions which are relevant to patients at this stage of the recovery journey.

Due to the nature of the patient group, there are risks which require to be considered, in relation to safety and security, in terms of supporting TSH patients to access the internet. This presents significant challenges for TSH patients who are BSL users in respect of access to the Scottish Government funded electronic BSL support system: ContactSCOTLAND-BSL.

TSH BSL Action Plan 2018-2024 Progress Update

It has been six years since TSH first BSL Plan was published in 2018, when the Board committed to protecting and supporting British Sign Language including in its tactile form. Our progress and achievements related to our identified action are detailed below:

Purpose	Action	Status
Staff / Volunteer training / awareness.	Develop new Supporting Patient Communication Policy which highlights the needs of BSL users.	Complete
	Develop BSL resource folder within TSH intranet.	In progress
	Undertake scoping exercise to determine BSL skill level and spread across the Hospital and support access to relevant online learning for staff directly involved in caring for a patient whose preferred form of communication is BSL.	Complete
Continuity of care.	Develop system to ensure electronic patient records (RiO / Vision etc. clearly show when the first or preferred language of a patient / carer / Named Person is BSL and a BSL / English Interpreter is needed.	Complete
	Develop Care Pathway for BSL users across the Forensic Network / Scottish Prison Service / NHS territorial boards.	Complete
Equal access.	Explore feasibility of supporting patient access to ContactSCOTLAND-BSL electronic support system.	In progress as part of Digital Inclusion work Streams
	Review Service Led Agreements (SLA) to determine specific plans are in place to ensure BSL support is clearly described within service delivery plans. Include SACRO in relation to visitor needs.	Complete
	Develop process to ensure BSL users can engage equitably with psychological therapies.	Complete
	Review format / content of TSH website to support equitable access for BSL users.	Complete
	Develop process to ensure BSL users can engage equitably with Skye Centre activities, including access to the shop, bank and library. Specifically identify activities / learning opportunities, working closely with external partners, to equip BSL users with the skills to support them to engage in vocational rehabilitation which enables them to contribute as valued members of society, able to engage in their chosen occupation.	Complete

Purpose	Action	Status
	Contribute to development of national Interpretation and Translation Policy (NHS Health Scotland).	Complete
	Develop process to ensure BSL users can attend and meaningfully contribute to the work of the Patient Partnership Group, as active citizens with a voice.	Complete
	Produce BSL version of Patient Welcome Pack.	Complete
	Produce BSL versions of statutory patient information.	Complete
	Explore options to recruit the services of volunteers who are able to provide expertise in BSL.	Complete
	Develop local processes to ensure patients who are BSL users are supported to make informed choices throughout their TSH journey and can contribute meaningfully to the CPA and Tribunal process. Include guidance through which local practice ensures that carers / Named Persons who are BSL users are able to contribute meaningfully to supporting the patient.	Complete

TSH BSL Action Plan 2025-2030

We have taken consideration of the national BSL Plan and national policy context in the development of our TSH BSL Local Plan to ensure robust and effective aims are set for the next 5 years. Our Plan is modelled on the following National Plan priorities

Delivering actions to support the implementation of the BSL National Plan.

We will deliver local actions to support the ambition of the BSL national plan. Our Person Centred Improvement Group will provide feedback on our plan.

Aim 1

Follow guidance on inclusive communication from Scottish Government, when available, in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty review to ensure BSL users are considered in communications.

Aim 2

Publish a progress report on the actions in 2027, the midway point for this plan. As a living plan, this will enable us to reflect on what further actions are required to help us meet our longer-term goals and overall vision for BSL in TSH.

BSL Accessibility

We will strive to remove accessibility as a barrier for BSL users, recognising the importance of having accessible information in the right format at the right time, utilising technology and increasing people's awareness of communication tools.

Aim 3

Continue to engage with BSL users and explore feasibility of supporting patients' access to ContactSCOTLAND-BSL electronic support system.

Aim 4

Develop a dedicated page on our intranet and website with information in BSL or signposting to relevant information available in BSL.

Governance

Monitoring Group - Progress to TSH BSL Action Plan will be monitored by the Person Centred Improvement Group bi-annually.

Reporting Structure - Annual update reports will be shared with the Clinical Governance Group and the Board and published on TSH website and intranet.

Dissemination - Update reports will be disseminated via the Staff Bulletin, Clinical Service and Skye Centre Leadership Teams, Patient Partnership Group.

Summary

Health literacy is a national priority, calling for a proactive approach to supporting patients to assume a collaborative role in care and treatment supporting their recovery. This requires a tailored approach to ensure barriers to effective communication are overcome.

TSH needs to anticipate the needs of BSL users by ensuring that robust processes are in place, which can be implemented, without delay, for communication to be effective from the outset.

Having developed and implemented the Pre-Admission Specific Needs Form, TSH is able to demonstrate a robust approach to anticipating the communication needs of every patient who is admitted to the Hospital, (given prior notice of the admission). This sharing of data supports Clinical Teams to discuss the needs of BSL users and make the necessary arrangements for continuity of existing arrangements for patients and carers whose preferred method of communication is BSL.

Given the infrequency of input required by patients / visitors / Named Persons using BSL, the Hospital understands the challenges around ensuring that practice to support BSL users to meaningfully engage remain current. However, a wide range of support mechanisms are in place across the NHS and Third Sector organisations, through which TSH will continue to develop helpful relationships to ensure support is available to develop local skills on an ongoing basis.

TSH consider this Action Plan to be a dynamic document which will be updated regularly and the Board is committed to contributing to the national update report in 2026.

TSH Supporting Patient Communication Policy includes a section dedicated to Sensory Impairment, which provides guidance about meeting the needs of BSL users, including working with a BSL / English interpreter.

A number of external partners were asked to contribute to the development of this plan including the Scottish Government Assisted Communications Team, Alliance Scotland, deafscotland and Scottish Health Council. The views of others will be sought to support achievement of the work streams identified in the above action plan.

If you are willing to provide feedback as the plan is refined throughout the coming five years and / or are able to offer specialist / experiential advice / input, on a voluntary basis, as required, please contact the Person Centred Improvement Lead.

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British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact the Person Centred Improvement Lead via ContactSCOTLAND-BSL