

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), 2 February  
2022

PE1867: Establish a new national qualification  
for British Sign Language (BSL)

## Note by the Clerk

**Lodged** 20 May 2021

**Petitioner** Scott Macmillan

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to establish a National Qualification in British Sign Language (BSL) at SCQF Level 2.

**Webpage** [petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1867](https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1867)

## Introduction

1. This is a continued petition that was last considered by the Committee at its meeting on [8 September 2021](#).
2. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to ascertain whether such a qualification could be introduced, what would be required in introducing it and which, if any, obstacles there might be to doing so.
3. A response has been received from SQA.

## Scottish Qualifications Authority submission

4. In its submission, the Scottish Qualifications Authority responds to the Committee's question regarding what qualifications must be in place to provide students with the opportunity to learn BSL, or any other additional language, from Primary 1 by stating:

“the answer to that question is not strictly in SQA's gift. You may be better to seek advice on this from our Scottish Government colleagues, who will be better placed to answer questions on their policy '[Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach](#)'.

5. The submission explains that the particular qualification types that are deemed to be part of the 'National Qualifications' suite include National Courses and National Units, at each level from SCQF level 1 up to SCQF level 7. These courses must support the aims and principles of Curriculum for Excellence and be suitable for delivery to learners in the Senior Phase of school (S4, S5 and S6).
6. The submission notes that the petitioner is calling for a new National Qualification in BSL at SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level 2. The submission explains that the different levels in the National Qualifications help SQA to recognise the attainment of learners of all abilities and ensure there are appropriate progression routes for learners. Since progression is a key consideration when developing new qualifications, SQA advise that they would not normally seek to develop a course in a new subject at just one level. Consideration must be given to the progression opportunities available for learners.
7. To ensure a fair appraisal of new requests, SQA advises that it has developed criteria which need to be met before consider developing National Courses in a new language. These are:
  - Evidence of demand for a National Course from language learners and delivering centres.
  - Sufficient qualified and registered teachers to develop, deliver and assess the National Course.
  - Strategic support from a range of partners within Scottish Education.
  - The availability of specific grant funding from the Scottish Government.
8. SQA advises that previously, BSL has failed to meet the first and second criteria. Alongside this, there is a shortage of available qualified teachers. These two issues were the focus of considerable debate after the BSL (Scotland) Act was passed in 2015 and while the BSL: National Plan 2017 to 2023 was being developed.

9. SQA advise that it has developed 'Awards' in BSL, rather than National Courses. These courses are a flexible qualification, that can be delivered in schools and other centres but are not recognised as National Courses. They would be equivalent size (in terms of learning hours) and made up of internally assessed units. This meant that SQA would not need to produce centrally marked exams in BSL for potentially a very low number of candidates. The Awards could then act as a stepping-stone towards the development of full National Courses in the future, if learner numbers increased sufficiently and if the teacher base expanded sufficiently.

## Action

10. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

### Clerk to the Committee

### Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting-

[PE1867/B: Scottish Qualifications Authority submission of 30 November 2021](#)

All written submissions received on the petition can be viewed on [the petition's webpage](#).