

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

16th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
8 November 2023

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

Lodged on 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 <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1867>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [8 March 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new response from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing for this petition](#).
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 162 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. The Committee may wish to note that the consultation on the BSL National Plan 2023-2029 referred to in the response from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills ran from 7 July 2023 to 3 September 2023.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

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

Petitioner

Scott Macmillan

Date lodged

20 May 2021

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.

Previous action

I have contacted Collette Stevenson MSP who is supportive of my petition

Background information

Currently there is no SQA British Sign Language (BSL) at SCQF Level 2 unlike French, Spanish, German, Italian, Gaelic (for learners), Urdu, Mandarin and Cantonese.

As a result, BSL cannot be taught from Primary 1 as an "L2" language. It is currently an "L3" language which means it can only be taught from Primary 5 onwards. A BSL SCQF Level 2 qualification would allow for pupils to be taught signs while they are learning English, minimising the barrier of communication between hearing and non-hearing children and adults.

The Scottish Government BSL National Plan, established in 2017, encourages more students to learn BSL in schools. However, I do not think it takes enough action to support this. I think that establishing this new qualification would lead to a higher uptake of children learning BSL, in both Primary and Secondary education.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1867 on 8 March 2023

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of continued petitions, the first of which is PE1867, lodged by Scott Macmillan and calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage the Scottish Qualifications Authority to establish a national qualification in British Sign Language at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 2.

A BSL interpretation of our discussion will be on the Parliament's BSL channel following today's meeting.

We last considered the petition in November 2022, when we agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to seek an update on the development of the next BSL plan and an exploration of how BSL national qualifications might be developed. We have received a response from the cabinet secretary that suggests that the Scottish Government will undertake engagement and consultation work to inform the priorities of the BSL national plan for 2023.

The cabinet secretary has also provided details on BSL awards currently available at SCQF levels 3 to 6. While delivery of those awards is still at an early stage, the cabinet secretary has indicated that uptake is increasing. The cabinet secretary goes on to state that, while the Scottish Government shares the petitioner's vision for BSL to be more widely taught in schools, having qualifications in place does not necessarily lead to the language being offered at level 2 by schools and it remains the choice of schools to decide which languages to teach. The Scottish Government, therefore, does not believe that the steps sought by the petitioner are necessarily sufficient to support an increased take-up of BSL.

We have considered the petition on a number of occasions. Do colleagues have any suggestions in light of the cabinet secretary's letter and her commitment to consult further on the 2023 plan?

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Might the committee be minded to keep the petition open and to write to the Scottish Government to seek details of the engagement and consultation that it plans to undertake when developing the new BSL national plan?

The Convener: Are we content to do that? These are vulnerable communities, and it would be too easy for us to say, "Let's just close the petition". We should keep up what pressure we can to see what changes we can help to facilitate.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 20 April 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the British Sign Language (BSL) Plan engagement and consultation plans and progress. I note the detail of Petition PE1867.

BSL National Plan engagement and consultation

As the Committee may be aware, we are currently developing a new BSL National Plan for 2023 – 2029. This has involved the formation of a Short Life Working Group for the plan, consisting of multiple BSL stakeholders: British Deaf Association (BDA), Deaf Action, Deafblind Scotland, Scottish Ethnic Minority Deaf Charity (SEMDC), National Deaf Children’s Society, and Scottish Sensory Hub.

My officials have confirmed that we will begin undertaking engagement with this group later this month, to clarify priorities for the plan, where national qualifications in BSL are likely to be raised. As part of this ongoing engagement, BSL organisations will be asked to run their own consultation events in BSL so that there is a two-way dialogue with members of the BSL communities around the plan. This approach will enable BSL-using individuals to raise questions and contribute meaningfully.

For the Committee’s awareness, there will also be a standard Scottish Government national consultation alongside this to offer opportunities for public bodies, local authorities and individuals to respond. This consultation will take place over the Summer and analysis of this consultation will help to form priorities and actions for the plan.

I hope the above is helpful in setting out the position in relation to the engagement and consultation process of the BSL National Plan 2023 –

2029, and to addressing the substantive query on the petition in question.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH MSP