

Building a sustainable framework for BSL in Scottish Schools

Event 1 26 November 2015: summary of discussions

Deaf ownership

There was consensus on the need to respect Deaf ownership of BSL as a language and teaching profession. We agreed that teaching BSL must have benefits for the Deaf community and not take resources away from Deaf children. This means careful management of resources at the beginning, and using pilot areas to build a strong case for teaching BSL. BSL as a language must be backed up with learning about and from Deaf culture and community – we should see language learning as partnership between parents, school and children.

Pilot areas

People agreed that we should start in areas where BSL is already being taught, as these schools will already have motivation plus some capacity and resources. In longer term, the pilots could develop into hubs to share resources and expertise to help BSL spread. Eight authorities currently offer some level of BSL at primary but models vary widely. Falkirk, Dingwall and Greenock were all mentioned as good starting points and **we will discuss these models in more detail at the next workshop**. Everyone agreed to prioritise quality not quantity, otherwise it will not work in the long term.

Motivation to learn

Curriculum for Excellence means that different Local Authorities and schools can choose what language they want to teach, so it's important that we help people see the value in learning BSL. Getting the support of head teachers is crucial. Learning BSL in areas with Deaf children means there is an obvious communication need which could help with motivation. However, some schools that teach BSL find that some parents (of Deaf or hearing children) do not want their children to learn to sign. **We agreed to develop some promotional materials highlighting the benefits of learning BSL** to be shared with parents, teachers and perhaps also health practitioners.

Using school clusters

People agreed to aim to use school clusters: this means a high school plus all the primary schools which feed into that school. Clusters are important because the 1+2 language policy means that children should learn one language all the way from P1 to S3, so high schools and primary schools will discuss together what languages to teach. Clusters are also important because it will improve transition into high school for Deaf children if there are children in other cluster primaries who have also learned some BSL. **We agreed that once we can show BSL working in a few schools, we should help those schools try and work with others in their cluster** – for example, a Deaf tutor based at one school could visit the other schools in that cluster. This can be an efficient use of resources.

Qualifications

We heard that National level qualifications are necessary in order for BSL to become an L2 (the language that is taught all the way from P1 to S3). We heard from Signature about the pilot of a BSL GCSE in England, which will hopefully be offered from 2017-18. Currently in Scotland there are various different awards bodies and people agreed it would be useful to have one national

qualification that is suitable for schools. We also heard about other types of qualifications offered by SQA such as Languages for Life awards. **We will learn more about the qualifications framework and credits in the second workshop.**

Before developing a qualification, the Expectations and Outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence might need tweaking, and there would need to be an agreed criteria for literacy in BSL (e.g., film?). Dingwall have already adapted criteria for Modern Languages to suit BSL so there is a starting point.

There may not seem to be any barriers to developing a National level qualification, but others pointed out the need for funding and enough registered teachers. The BSL Act can be a driver, but it does not mention education specifically and SQA cannot create qualifications in a vacuum. **We agreed to help facilitate conversation between SQA, Scottish Government, General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS), the Universities and other stakeholders to try and develop the workforce needed to develop and maintain qualifications provision.**

Workforce

Everyone agreed there are not enough Deaf people currently qualified as tutors and teachers. As a short-term solution, people discussed the possibility of co-teaching: a hearing classroom teacher working with a Deaf language assistant, similar to native language assistants who help teach French or Chinese. However, this would probably need communication support for the classroom teacher and BSL teacher to work together. A better approach might be to make best use of existing BSL teachers. **We agreed to think about how existing skills could be enhanced to meet different needs – for example, training on age-appropriate teaching and awareness of different learning styles.** Some teachers may need more training in BSL, especially hearing teachers.

People noted that English language requirements prevent many Deaf people from working in schools. People discussed whether we should relax these requirements, or if that might stigmatise Deaf people further. **We agreed to discuss teacher registration requirements further with GTCS, and to discuss Deaf access to ESOL courses with Education Scotland.**

People agreed in the longer term we need an agreed standard for BSL teachers. This would prevent cowboys from being able to teach BSL. **We agreed to explore the possibility of a PDGE with BSL with the universities, starting with Moray House school of Education at University of Edinburgh.**

Resources

We agreed there would need to be quality control for teaching resources as well as for teachers. People suggested developing family friendly apps so that families can learn with their children: when children learn Gaelic at school, most of their parents don't speak Gaelic, so could we learn from the support for parents of Gaelic learners? We were reminded that online or distance learning does not usually work well until the basics are well covered, so resources for face to face teaching is the most important. Some BSL tutors said they felt there could be more collaboration to share resources between BSL teachers. **We agreed we would try and support BSL teachers coming together to share teaching materials.**

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