



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Minister for Disabled People,
Health and Work
4th Floor
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA

www.dwp.gov.uk
27th January 2022

Dear colleague,

British Sign Language Private Members' Bill.

I am writing to let you know that the Government is supporting the British Sign Language Private Members' Bill which was tabled by Rosie Cooper MP and is due for its Second Reading on 28 January 2022.

This Bill's goals are shared in the vision and approach set out by the Government to transform the lives of disabled people. It will also support efforts to further reduce the jobs gap with non-disabled people.

British Sign Language is the primary form of communication for approximately 90,000 residents of the UK (with around 150,000 users in total). Its vocabulary and syntax do not replicate spoken English and many Deaf citizens have a much lower reading comprehension age than the general population. Too many Deaf people in the UK continue to face barriers to communication which affect employment, education and access to healthcare.

British Sign Language interpretation can be provided by public sector organisations as a 'reasonable adjustment' through the Equality Act (2010). However, we know that individuals can still face difficulties obtaining interpretation, which may present barriers to accessing vital services.

Working closely with Rosie, we have agreed that the Bill will recognise British Sign Language (BSL) as a language of Great Britain, with ultimately the objective of increasing access to BSL interpretation. The Bill does not extend to Northern Ireland, reflecting the territorial scope of the Equality Act 2010; there are also two distinct sign languages in Northern Ireland (the other is Irish Sign Language).

This will place a duty on Ministerial departments to report on their use and facilitation of British Sign Language at least every 3 years as well as a requirement on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to issue guidance to departments on the promotion and facilitation of BSL.

Alongside recognising British Sign Language as a language of Great Britain, we will:

- establish a non-statutory advisory board of British Sign Language users to advise the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on BSL guidance

- examine how to increase the number of British Sign Language interpreters
- review the Access to Work scheme, which funds workplace adjustments, to ensure users of British Sign Language receive the support they need

In my role as Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work I have the privilege of meeting disabled people right across this country. These changes are an important step towards levelling up this country for disabled people. I will place a copy of this letter in the library.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chloe Smith', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Chloe Smith MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work