

The British Sign Language (BSL) report 2023-2024

1. Introduction

The [British Sign Language \(BSL\) Act 2022](#) (“The BSL Act”) received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022. It was introduced to the House of Commons as a Private Members’ Bill by Rosie Cooper MP and gained cross-party and government support.

The BSL Act legally recognises BSL as a language of England, Scotland and Wales (but not Northern Ireland, where equality law is devolved). It also requires the government to report on the use of BSL by the ministerial departments named in the schedule to the BSL Act, in their public communications.

The [first BSL report](#) was published on 31 July 2023. The BSL Act requires that a report will be published every 3 years. The government of the day committed to publishing a report every year for the 5 years to follow. However, publication of the second annual report, which had been planned for July 2024, was delayed by the UK General Election.

The new government is strongly committed to continuing to improve the accessibility of government communications for everyone, including the Deaf community and BSL users.

This report therefore covers BSL usage in government communications from 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024. This publication is voluntary (it is not required by law), and aims to increase transparency and support further increases in accessibility. It does not represent the formal publication of the data for the 2023 to 2024 reporting year. A formal statutory report will be published in July 2025, which will include data for the 2 reporting years from May 2023 to April 2025.

Everyone in our country should have access to important information from the government and should be able to engage with the government on issues that will affect them. That is why it is crucial to make sure that government communications are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

2. Context and background

2.1 Deafness and BSL use in the UK

According to the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), 1 in 5 people (or 12 million people) in the UK are Deaf or hard of hearing. BSL users in the UK can face social exclusion as a direct result of linguistic exclusion. This can negatively affect their employment, education, access to healthcare, and navigation of the justice system and victim support.

2.2 Equality legislation

The BSL Act legally recognised BSL as a language of England, Wales and Scotland. The BSL Act works in tandem with existing legislation, most notably the Equality Act 2010, which requires ‘reasonable adjustments’ to be made by a wide range of people and sectors to ensure that disabled people have equal access to goods and services. The BSL Act preserves the architecture of the Equality Act while also placing a new BSL reporting requirement on the government. Further background is available in the [first BSL report](#).

2.3 BSL Advisory Board

A non-statutory board of mainly BSL users was established in March 2023. Its role is to advise the government on matters of importance to Deaf people and on implementing the BSL Act. The BSL Advisory Board is co-chaired by Craig Crowley MBE FRSA and a senior civil servant.

During the period covered by this report (1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024), the BSL Advisory Board met 4 times, including with the then Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work. It identified and discussed important issues faced by the Deaf community, and formed 3 subgroups covering education, health and social care, and government communications. The Board also provided expert advice to:

- the Department for Education (DfE) for their consultation on the new BSL GCSE
- the Cabinet Office’s Disability Unit (DU) on the content of the Disability Action Plan
- the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on Deaf access to sport

3. Reporting requirements for government departments

The BSL Act requires that [ministerial government departments named in the act](#) must report on how they are promoting or using BSL in their public communications. Under the act, only core departments need to report on how they promote and use BSL in their communications. Non-departmental public bodies and other arm's-length bodies are not in scope of the act, but are encouraged to use BSL translation and interpreting where it meets the needs of their audiences.

The act specifically covers any public announcement on policy or changes to the law, and publication of plans, strategies, policies, and consultations and responses. It also mentions press conferences, social media, and government websites.

The BSL reporting duty is not intended to capture detail about individual requests for BSL interpretation services in front-facing operational delivery as a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 – for example, in health or education settings, ports, police stations, courts, or Jobcentres.

The BSL Act 2022 does not require the government to report on any personal communications with individuals that may have been translated into BSL, such as ministerial letters to individuals, Freedom of Information requests, correspondence, or meetings with ministers or officials, where there has been a request for a BSL translator.

The reporting duty is mainly focused on information intended to be shared with the wider public. This approach gives those ministerial departments named in the schedule to the act the opportunity to build on good practice, share knowledge and increase the provision of BSL interpretation where needed. According to the terms of the act, the information will be collated by DU and the findings set out or summarised in a report at least every 3 years.

The duty requires the government to report on the use of BSL rather than an absolute requirement to provide BSL translation in all public communications. However, the general approach is to encourage those government departments included in the scope of the act to carefully consider including BSL Interpretation in the public communications of the central government.

4. Good practice and case studies by department

The [first BSL report](#) showed that government departments and organisations already create a range of accessible communications, including increasing use of BSL translations and interpreting. However, it also showed that there is more to do to ensure that government departments and organisations improve the experience of Deaf people when they interact with the government.

This second report demonstrates a significant increase in the use of BSL by government departments in public-facing communications, compared to the first report.

The overall number of BSL communications produced by government departments during this reporting period has more than doubled, rising from 76 in the first reporting period to 176 during the second reporting period, with 6 more departments reporting BSL activity. This represents an encouraging improvement, although there is still further to go.

Full details of this year's activities are set out in part 5 of this report. This section provides some examples and case studies of how the government used BSL in this reporting period.

4.1 Cabinet Office

The Cabinet Office, which includes 10 Downing Street, produced the highest volume of public-facing BSL communications of any department in this reporting period. The majority of this was press conferences, social media or government websites used to publicise activities or policies in BSL. During this reporting period, 10 Downing Street also did extensive preparation to enable BSL interpretation of the Prime Minister's major speeches, to be found on the Prime Minister's social media channels (X, formerly Twitter, and YouTube) with BSL versions being published as soon as possible as the new default. This approach commenced after this reporting period, starting in July 2024.

In February 2024, DU published its [Disability Action Plan](#) with a range of formats to be as inclusive and accessible as possible. These formats included [BSL video translations](#) with audio and subtitles. In-person BSL interpretation was provided at

the Disability Action Plan launch event, and the communications team developed additional materials that were available in BSL, including a [video](#) which had over 3,200 views by the end of the reporting period, alongside a [BSL press notice](#).

This followed on from the production of a wide range of accessible formats (including BSL) for the public [consultation](#) on the draft Disability Action Plan, so that disabled people, disabled people's organisations, and other interested parties could have their say. In addition to these policy documents, the Cabinet Office's Equality Hub communications team published in BSL:

- a [ministerial video](#) which received more than 7,800 views and 1,200 engagements
- a [consultation video](#) which achieved 1,165 views and 176 engagements
- a [BSL press notice](#)

The consultation was open for 12 weeks between 18 July and 6 October 2023 and received over 1,300 responses.

4.2 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

DWP continues to be one of the government departments leading the way on production of BSL public communications.

DWP has a dedicated BSL channel on YouTube called [DWPsign](#). In the reporting period there have been approximately 29,000 views of the content on this channel.

BSL videos produced by DWP in the reporting period include:

- public announcements on [Disability Cost of Living Payment](#),
- publications on a public consultation for [Occupational Health](#)
- a social media post on LinkedIn covering [Universal Support](#)

4.3 Home Office

Throughout the reporting period, the Home Office has worked to improve awareness among its staff of how to gain access to BSL interpretation and translation. They have issued internal communications and established a dedicated team to work with a provider and staff.

As a result, they have produced a high number of BSL communications including guidance and support for victims of domestic abuse, forced marriages or coercive and controlling behaviour.

4.4 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla

As part of the public guidance, DCMS published a dedicated [BSL explainer video](#) about the Coronation of His Majesty the King, and how to get involved. At the end of the reporting period, the video had around 28,000 views across DCMS' social media channels and 225,000 web page views.

Loneliness campaign

In May 2024, DCMS worked with a specialist agency to produce BSL versions of the Loneliness creative assets. The Loneliness campaign aims to destigmatise and normalise loneliness and feelings around it, for people between 16 and 24 years old.

The BSL videos are available to view on DCMS YouTube channel:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwYRQEABLFM>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i33sqVucKIA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iFP3GmB9j8>

These videos were shared across DCMS social channels at important campaign moments and wider national moments in connection with the BSL community. DCMS also worked with high profile figures who are part of the Deaf community, to amplify BSL videos and content across their social channels. This includes Love Island's Tasha Ghouri (1.4 million followers). At the end of the reporting period the videos had attracted around 15,000 impressions on DCMS's X account (formerly Twitter).

4.5 Attorney General's Office (AGO)

The AGO has started to share BSL videos from Attorney General's Questions (AGQs) to LinkedIn as well as X (formerly twitter). The videos can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

4.6 Department for Education (DfE)

The introduction of a GCSE in BSL is a landmark moment which will allow students to work towards a qualification that is internationally recognised and accepted in school and college performance tables.

Following a [12-week public consultation](#), the subject content for the new BSL GCSE was published on 21 December 2023. The public consultation, the government response, and the confirmed subject content of the BSL GCSE were available in BSL. The department received 717 responses to the public consultation. Respondents were overwhelmingly in favour of the proposals. In addition, DfE sought views from the BSL Advisory Board on the GCSE content and implementation.

DfE posted [graphics](#), [photos](#) and a [video](#) from the then Secretary of State's visit to Spitalfields Market on X, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. She met with BSL user and business owner Punk Chef (aka Scott Garthwaite, also a member of the BSL Advisory Board) alongside activist for the Deaf community and influencer Tasha Ghouri. At the end of the reporting period, this had 44,856 impressions and 458 engagements in total. The then Secretary of State posted the video from the visit to [X](#) and [Instagram](#), gaining a total of 202 likes by the end of the reporting period.

4.7 Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

DHSC added a BSL translation to content explaining the planned Smokefree Generation policy. This policy proposed to introduce a health intervention to curb youth smoking and underage vaping in all 4 nations of the UK through the introduction of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill in Parliament.

As health is devolved, the video featured [the 4 UK Chief Medical Officers supporting the introduction of the Bill in parliament](#) and encouraging people – including parliamentarians, charities, civil society and general public – to support it. The video is hosted on DHSC's YouTube channel, on a [BSL playlist](#) alongside other BSL videos. It is also on a playlist featuring videos supporting the Tobacco and Vapes Bill/Smokefree Generation policy.

The plan was to use this video on social channels and share with supportive

networks and stakeholders as the bill made its way through the different stages in Parliament and received Royal Assent. However, this was paused due to the 2024 General Election.

4.8 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)

The annual National BSL Day commemorates the UK Parliament's legal recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) as a language of Great Britain on 28 April 2022.

To celebrate this day through the themes of DSIT, the department organised a ministerial visit and digital content for Saqib Bhatti, DSIT's Ministerial Disability Champion at the time. The minister visited Waterloo Station in London to see how new digital screens are using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to translate live journey information into BSL. The minister was joined by the Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy Policy Lead at Network Rail to explain how the screens work, a BSL user and stakeholder from DeafPlus to discuss the benefits of the technology, and a BSL interpreter.

Content taken during the day was posted on [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) and [LinkedIn](#), receiving:

- 16,400 impressions on X
- 2,700 impressions on Facebook
- 11,600 impressions on LinkedIn
- 31 retweets, including from important stakeholders in the Deaf community
- 21 LinkedIn reposts, including from The Human AI Institute, the Cabinet Office's Equality Hub, the Department for Education, and Andrew Haines (CEO of Network Rail)

4.9 Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)

DESNZ's BSL-supported social media content in this reporting period was focused on communicating about the Warm Home Discount, a benefit for which 3 million homes are eligible, and energy-saving tips as part of DESNZ's *It All Adds Up* campaign.

Videos were posted on DESNZ's X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram accounts. The [Warm Home Discount video featuring then-Minister Solloway](#) was

DESNZ's fourth most popular tweet in January (out of 35 tweets), getting 11,190 impressions and 52 engagements (compared to DESNZ's Twitter average for the month of 6,679 and 52 respectively). It was DESNZ's third most popular Facebook post in January out of 16 posts, getting 10,393 impressions and 112 engagements against the Facebook average for the month of 3890 and 65 respectively. The video was also shared by the UK government page – which has 1.1 million followers – and some councils.

4.10 Department for Transport (DfT)

DfT integrated BSL into the ['it's everyone's journey'](#) inclusive transport campaign. The campaign forms part of DfT's Inclusive Transport Strategy and supports the ambition for equal access for all on public transport. The campaign was initially launched in February 2020 but was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was relaunched in September 2022, with another activity burst in March 2024.

Two videos were translated into BSL for the campaign. These were hosted on YouTube and users could find them via the main campaign website. DfT also [tweeted](#) the accessible versions of the videos through their 'it's everyone's journey' X account multiple times throughout the reporting period. The ['it's everyone's journey – Bus with BSL'](#) video covered ways to make travelling by bus a better experience for all passengers, especially those with accessibility needs. The video had 47,000 views in the BSL format. The ['it's everyone's journey – Train with BSL'](#) video covered similar themes from a rail perspective, receiving 31 views in the BSL format.

DfT posted their train or bus with BSL videos on:

- [10 August 2023](#) (330 impressions, 4 engagements and 81 video views)
- [12 August 2023](#) (213 impressions, 5 engagements and 45 video views)
- [17 August 2023](#) (167 impressions, 5 engagements and 24 video views)
- [8 March 2024](#) (6 engagements, 16 video views)

On 20 March 2024, for Sign Language Week, DfT [posted on the 'it's everyone's journey' account](#) to highlight the BSL platform information screens which Network Rail has rolled out across their managed stations. By the end of the reporting period, the clip received 156 impressions, 6 engagements and 57 video views.

4.11 Ministry of Justice (MOJ)

MOJ produced BSL versions of a [consultation](#) that looked at proposals to encourage the earlier resolution of private family disputes. These included introducing a requirement for parties to attempt mediation before coming to court. This aimed to increase agreements outside the courts, where safe and appropriate, aiming to support the best interests of families while reducing the court backlog.

MOJ recognised the need to create accessible BSL content for the Deaf community. They wanted to reach as many people as possible with the proposals and give everyone a fair chance to review and respond

They produced BSL versions of both the original consultation, which ran from March to June 2023, and the consultation response, published in January 2024.

4.12 Ministry of Defence (MOD)

MOD continues to create more BSL content where there is opportunity to do so. In this reporting period, BSL translations were provided for 2 videos of the Secretary of State for Defence speaking about [MOD's 14 new Chinooks](#) and the [Spitfire during British Science Week](#). There was also a BSL version of an [access all areas video](#) detailing the impact of training and equipment given to Ukrainian soldiers by the UK armed forces. Whilst there may be less opportunity for MOD announcements in comparison to more public-facing government departments, the MOD continues the aim of creating more engaging BSL content, promoting the use of BSL internally, and considering best use of social media to cover important events.

4.13 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)¹

DLUHC produced 2 pieces of BSL content during the reporting period. This includes a video that tells social housing residents how to report and make complaints about issues with their home or landlord. As part of the [Make Things Right campaign](#), it offers practical advice that will help more Deaf tenants exercise their rights. The video features on the [campaign website](#) and was posted several times on DLUHC's social media channels.

DLUHC also produced a video explaining how the government's Social Housing Regulation Act and related reforms would help social housing residents. This was posted on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

In addition, DLUHC have put processes in place that will ensure BSL is embedded into relevant communications across the department. This includes putting a contract in place with an agency to provide BSL content, and promoting it to staff.

4.14 HM Treasury (HMT)

HMT partnered with Parliament TV to ensure BSL translations of the then Chancellor's [Autumn Statement](#) and [Spring Budget](#) speeches were available in real time.

This allowed Parliament TV to arrange and broadcast accurate BSL alongside the then Chancellor as he gave his speech. HMT will continue to do this in future.

4.15 Department for Business and Trade (DBT)

Following the launch of the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage campaign in April 2023, DBT developed BSL communications which were then shared across its [social media channels](#) within this reporting period as the campaign continued, with follow-up campaign content going live in June.

¹ During the reporting period, the department was known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Following the July 2024 general election the department is now known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

4.16 Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland²

The Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland produced a video with Deaf Action, a Deaf-led charity based in Edinburgh that supports and celebrates Deaf people. Deaf Action provides a wide range of services to hard of hearing and Deaf people, designed to make life easier and more fulfilling, from dealing with isolation through engagement with social clubs to support in getting into employment.

The Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland's video showcased Deaf Action's work in supporting Deaf or hard of hearing people into work. The video itself was available with BSL and subtitles and was published in February 2024. Within the reporting period, it generated over 5,000 views on X (formerly Twitter) and over 1,500 views on Instagram.

² During the reporting period, the department was known as the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Following the July 2024 general election the department is now known as the Scotland Office.

5. Summary and next steps

The duties in the BSL Act encourage government departments to improve how they communicate with, and meet the needs of, the Deaf community. Different departments will approach, and have approached, implementation of the BSL Act differently to suit the needs of their specific audiences. Departments produce different amounts and types of public communications and this can vary year on year.

The [first BSL report](#) serves as a baseline from which the government should aim to improve. This second report, published on a voluntary basis, demonstrates a positive increase in BSL activity across government departments.

In total, BSL activity more than doubled across the government, as 176 BSL communications were produced during the second reporting period, compared to 76 during the first reporting period.

The increase of BSL communications has occurred across many government departments in the 2023 to 2024 reporting year. The Cabinet Office had the most BSL communications out of all government departments in this reporting period (45), along with the biggest increase (26). This was followed by the Home Office with an increase of 19 (from 8 to 27), and DWP with an increase of 13 (from 25 to 38).

The number of government departments who said they had not produced any BSL communications for the public during this reporting period more than halved, from 11 to 5. In addition, all types of BSL activity increased from the first reporting period to this reporting period. This included a large increase in press conferences, social media or government website use to publicise activities or policies in BSL from 31 to 100.

The improvements made since the first report show the engagement and commitment from government departments to make their content accessible to BSL users. This should be maintained and improved where possible to ensure that the government continues to go further to improve how they communicate with Deaf citizens. The Minister for Social Security and Disability, and DU, will continue to support departments across government to fulfil this commitment.

In addition to the reporting requirement from government departments, part 3 of the BSL Act also requires the government to issue guidance including:

- advice for relevant government departments on best practice to support BSL under both the Equality Act 2010 and BSL Act 2022
- advice more broadly on best practice for communicating with BSL users (both when interacting with individuals and when communicating with the general public), including case studies to illustrate the value of providing BSL interpretation in communications with the public

The BSL Advisory Board will advise the government on the guidance detailed in the BSL Act, and its implementation to best represent the Deaf community. This external guidance will be published in due course with support from DU.

5.1 Increase publication of data

Although the act only requires for a BSL report to be published once every 3 years, the then government said in the first BSL report that it aimed to publish one every year for at least the following 5 years. In publishing this report, the new government is meeting this aim and will continue to do so in the years to come. This will help to drive improvement, highlight successes and areas where further progress is needed, and ensure accountability.

5.2 Take ministerial responsibility to improve BSL use

The previous Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work chaired a group of Ministerial Disability Champions (MDCs). These ministers provided a personal lead and commitment to championing accessibility and opportunity for disabled people within their departments. In the first BSL report, the government committed to discussing the report at a meeting of the MDCs. In fact, the first report and the BSL reporting duty more broadly were discussed at 3 meetings of the MDCs during the reporting period.

5.3 Produce improvement plans in each department

Building on this discussion, the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asked each ministerial department to produce a 5-year BSL Plan, setting out how they plan to improve the use of BSL within their departments. However, production of these plans was delayed by the general election.

5.4 Issue internal guidance to civil servants

Government Communications Service internal guidance for government departments was published in October 2023, covering best practice and things to consider when planning communications for BSL users, creating a BSL translation or using BSL interpreters, as well as advice on how to procure BSL translation or interpreting.

6. Annex: BSL activity by ministerial department

Reporting period: 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024

Government Department	Public announcements about policy or about changes to the law in BSL	Publications (plans, strategies, consultation documents or consultation responses) in BSL	Press conferences, social media or government website use to publicise activities or policies in BSL
Attorney General's Office	0	0	8
Cabinet Office	1	1	43
Department for Business & Trade³	0	0	1
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	0	0	15
Department for Education	0	4	4
Department for Energy, Security & Net Zero⁴	0	0	5
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	0	0	0
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and	0	0	2

³ Department for Business and Trade's (DBT) first year submission was included as part of the Department for International Trade (DIT) as DBT was established in a 'Machinery of Government' change 2 months before the end of the first reporting period.

⁴ Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) first year submission was included as part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as DESNZ was established in a 'Machinery of Government' change 2 months before the end of the first reporting period.

Government Department	Public announcements about policy or about changes to the law in BSL	Publications (plans, strategies, consultation documents or consultation responses) in BSL	Press conferences, social media or government website use to publicise activities or policies in BSL
Communities⁵			
Department for Science, Innovation & Technology⁶	2	0	4
Department for Transport	1	2	2
Department for Work & Pensions	13	20	5
Department of Health & Social Care	0	0	6
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office	0	0	0
His Majesty's Treasury	2	0	0
Home Office	0	27	0
Ministry of Defence	0	0	3
Ministry of Justice	0	3	1
Office of the Leader of the	0	0	0

⁵ During the reporting period the department was known as the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Following the July 2024 general election the department is now known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

⁶ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) first year submission was included as part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as DSIT was established in a 'Machinery of Government' change 2 months before the end of the first reporting period.

Government Department	Public announcements about policy or about changes to the law in BSL	Publications (plans, strategies, consultation documents or consultation responses) in BSL	Press conferences, social media or government website use to publicise activities or policies in BSL
House of Commons			
Office of the Leader of the House of Lords	0	0	0
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland⁷⁸	0	0	1
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales⁹¹⁰	0	0	0

⁷ During the first reporting period the department was known as the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Following the July 2024 general election the department is now known as Scotland Office.

⁸ The Scottish and Welsh governments are not subject to the reporting duty and communications about matters that are devolved are outside the scope of this report

⁹ During the first reporting period the department was known as the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales. Following the July 2024 general election the department is now known as Wales Office.

¹⁰ The Scottish and Welsh governments are not subject to the reporting duty and communications about matters that are devolved are outside the scope of this report