

# Devon Charter for British Sign Language (BSL)

This Charter contains a series of pledges that are aimed at improving the lives of Deaf people in Devon – providing a framework for organisations on how to ensure Deaf people access services and education fully and have their language needs met on contact.

The Charter contains a number of commitments which organisations will either have in place, or will be working towards achieving within a reasonable timescale (where there are significant problems with 'internal' resources or 'external' provisions such as BSL tuition in the area). Organisations signed up to the Charter can achieve a 'Working Towards' or 'Achievement' award for the pledges.

It is expected that the Charter will give Deaf people, who use BSL, a basis on which to assert their rights to receive a minimum standard of service from an organisation. It translates the legal duties of the Disability Discrimination Act into practical, meaningful solutions.

It is expected that the Pledges will be achieved in full by the following deadlines:

Pledge 1 – April 2007	Pledge 2 – April 2010	Pledge 3 – April 2012
Pledge 4 – April 2012	Pledge 5 – April 2007	

This Charter has been developed for the people of Devon, by the Devon BSL Charter Group. It is based upon the British Deaf Association's Charter for British Sign Language.

The Charter, and those who have signed up to the Charter, will undergo a review on an annual basis. Further pledges may be developed as a result. The core group, known as the Devon BSL Charter Group, will carry out the monitoring and review role.

## Overarching commitments

In signing up to this Charter:

1. We recognise and acknowledge Deaf culture and British Sign Language fully.
2. We will work with partners to develop innovative solutions.
3. We are committed to promoting this Charter through service level agreements, contracts and taxi licensing.
4. We will develop action plans to implement pledges relevant to the organisation, commit funds and resources to implement the actions, and seek other funding opportunities from different sources.
5. We will work towards increasing the number and diversity of BSL/English interpreters locally and providing better access to interpreters.
6. We will work in partnership with agencies by promoting issues faced by Deaf people.
7. We will raise awareness and lobby government organisations to increase funding and resources to enable Deaf people to feel fully included in society.

*Not all pledges will be relevant to all organisations and therefore an organisation may be exempted from a pledge that is not relevant to its business/service (e.g. Pledge 3 will only apply to educational establishments).*

## Pledge 1

### Improve access for Deaf people to local services and information

We are committed to...

1. Promoting awareness raising/training of British Sign Language awareness and Deaf culture awareness corporately, in particular with front-line staff.
2. Implementing policies on the use of registered BSL/English interpreters (IRP and/or ASLI Member) and raising awareness of the use of registered interpreters.
3. Providing information in Plain English, and BSL when requested.
4. Ensuring our signage and buildings are accessible and clear.
5. Ensuring services we provide are accessible by use of technology such as SMS, text-phones, fax, email or video-phone.
6. Adapting our web-pages to be more 'BSL friendly'.

#### **Pledge 1 Suggested Evidence:**

- 1) Front line staff (being those that come into contact with the public) are provided BSL awareness/Deaf culture awareness. Ideally, Deaf awareness is provided by Deaf people. Reception/public access areas indicate level(s) of staff BSL skills.
- 2) A policy for interpreters is available for staff and includes information on: who to book, how to book, when to book, what information is required by an interpreter, and funding implications. This policy may be part of a broader policy on interpretation. ASLI can provide guidance to organisations for assisting in writing policies and funding implications.
- 3) Information is provided in Plain English and made available in BSL on request.
- 4) Signage is in symbol-form and, if words are necessary, this is in Plain English. Visual alerting systems are available. Maps are provided in a 'BSL friendly' format, to help Deaf people find their way around services and buildings. There is a system for auditing access to buildings.
- 5) Alternative contact numbers and addresses (e.g. email, sms text) are published as widely as main telephone numbers. Other equipment in use and accessibility is also publicised.
- 6) Introduction pages and key information on websites is interpreted into BSL (advice on how to do this may be sought from ASLI); plain English and symbols are used.
- 7) Standards are applied across the whole organisation.
- 8) Equality Impact and Needs Assessments are carried out on policies and practices in relation to Deaf people.

## Pledge 2

### Promote learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language

We are committed to...

1. Increasing the number and range of BSL courses in the area by working in partnership with learning providers and funders of learning to share best practice, promote resources and identify gaps in the market.
2. Ensuring tutors are native (Deaf) or fluent (Hearing) users of BSL, with a comprehensive knowledge of Deaf culture. 'Fluent' tutors will be qualified to NVQ level 3 (or equivalent) in BSL; By 2010, 'native' tutors will all have reached NVQ level 3. Ideally tutors will reach Level 4 BSL, and this will be encouraged.
3. Ensuring tutors have currently recognised Teacher Training qualifications and their skills are regularly updated.
4. Improving access to financial support for parents/guardians and siblings of Deaf children and young people who wish to learn BSL.

#### **Pledge 2 Suggested Evidence:**

- 1) A range of courses are available across Devon, at a variety of times and locations and include N/SVQ levels 1,2,3 and 4. Deaf-led enterprises which offer BSL courses are supported.
- 2) Tutors of BSL are assisted to become qualified to NVQ level 3 or 4 and in teacher training. Organisations that use 'training credits' or competency frameworks have built BSL skills into these frameworks.
- 3) Resources to support learning BSL are available (for example, libraries, staff-room reading materials, on-line resources). Refresher courses and sign language practice sessions for learners and tutors are established.
- 4) Funding is sought to help families of Deaf children and young people to access BSL courses, for example to level 2, or equivalent standard.
- 5) Courses are well advertised.

## Pledge 3

### Give all Deaf children the option of learning BSL and English

We are committed to...

1. Defining 'bilingual education'.
2. Offering Deaf children the option of learning BSL alongside English, taking into account communication and education needs as a child develops.
3. Ensuring children and families are supported from the point of diagnosis of deafness onwards, encouraging children to acquire age-appropriate language skills, taking into account additional needs.
4. Enabling Deaf children to be flexible enough to make a choice over BSL or English as a 'preferred language'.
5. Providing balanced information on the ranges of options to parents/guardians to help them support their child in being flexible about language.
6. Offering newly diagnosed young children and their families weekly access to BSL tutors.
7. Giving Deaf children/students the same educational opportunities in order to achieve good levels of attainment, social responsibility and citizenship.
8. Raising awareness of BSL and Deaf culture within the education/school community.
9. Developing the skills of staff who work with Deaf children/students so that they can communicate in BSL up to a minimum of N/SVQ level 2 or equivalent. Providing opportunities for key staff to train to level 3 and 4 where required.
10. Increasing the number of qualified Deaf staff within Education.
11. Providing opportunities for Deaf children/students to meet with Deaf peers and role models.

### **Pledge 3 Suggested Evidence:**

- 1) The Local Authority networks with other local authorities following bi-lingual approaches and to maximise knowledge and skills.
- 2) Deaf children/students are taught the principles, grammar and literacy aspects of BSL as well as English. A qualification (such as GCSE) is available in BSL/Deaf Studies. The school/educational establishment engages in lobbying organisations for the inclusion of BSL in teacher training and inclusion of Deaf people in curriculum development.
- 3) There is a system in place for contacting parents/guardians of newly diagnosed Deaf children and developing an effective support system. Children/young people who are Deaf will be given a Statement of Educational Needs that includes a skilled assessment of their language needs.
- 4) The school/educational establishment is inclusive. This means that policies on inclusion specifically include meeting Deaf people's needs, promote choice, are communicated well and training in BSL and Deaf culture is provided to an appropriate level. BSL friendly information is provided on courses. Public messages, policies and information in schools with Deaf children, or Deaf parents/guardians of children attending the school, are in plain English and 'BSL friendly' (or interpreted as necessary). The school/educational establishment uses qualified interpreters where required and provides information about meetings/parents' evenings/events to parents/guardians in plenty of time so that interpreters can be booked. Speech therapy is provided as appropriate.
- 5) Parents/guardians are provided with balanced information on the ranges of options available to help them support their child in being flexible about language choices.
- 6) A programme is developed to be used in the home by Deaf tutors, which focuses on developing communication skills, BSL and Deaf culture.
- 7) A system for monitoring Deaf children/students' competence (in both BSL and English) and inclusion in mainstream classes and activities is in place and understood by staff. Data is collated regularly and pupil/student progress is reported to Governors and parents/guardians of Deaf children. Parents/guardians and Governors are provided with the opportunity to discuss the outcomes and areas for improvement. The school/educational establishment welcomes challenges and seeks for continuous improvement and consistent standards between its Deaf and Hearing pupils/students. Policies and practices are reviewed regularly. Adjustments are made to examination processes, admissions processes, assemblies and other school activities so that Deaf children, and children whose preferred language is BSL can engage fully. If a Deaf child/student is not included in mainstream activities, there are clear and objective reasons for doing so and these are communicated to all those concerned. Strategies are then developed to

achieve inclusion. To enhance learning, visual and sensory tools are used widely in education. Sex Education is provided in BSL by an appropriately qualified person in an appropriate environment.

- 8) Hearing children/students are provided the opportunity to learn Deaf studies and BSL, to enable them to engage with Deaf colleagues and Deaf people within the classroom and socially. This may be built into the 'Citizenship' curriculum. Careers guidance includes advice on working with Deaf people or becoming a BSL/English interpreter. Deaf Awareness Week may be used to raise awareness.
- 9) Evidence of staff training and skills.
- 10) Deaf people will be recruited or contracted for relevant work, positive action is taken to improve recruitment and promotion opportunities for Deaf people in Education. Deaf Youth Workers are employed to make links with the wider community.
- 11) Positive role models are pointed out to Deaf children/students through improved links with Deaf people. Deaf children/students and those who can use BSL are brought together (for example, by setting up a club or network and providing members with a place to meet). Video conferencing is explored. The achievements of Deaf people are celebrated as part of the curriculum as much as possible, for example – Deaf leaders within History lessons, Deaf musicians and artists, libraries stock books with Deaf people/heroes and heroines.

NB: 'Schools/educational establishments' and 'children/students' relate to those in: pre-school, primary school, secondary school, college, university, adult education etc.

## Pledge 4

### Ensure key staff working with Deaf people meet minimum standards of BSL skills

We are committed to...

1. Ensuring staff who deal regularly with Deaf people face-to-face are trained to a minimum of NVQ Level 2 in BSL.
2. Ensuring staff who have involved dealings with Deaf people, on a daily basis, are trained to a minimum of NVQ Level 3 in BSL.
3. Ensuring staff maintain their skills and keep them regularly updated.

#### **Pledge 4 Suggested Evidence:**

- 1) The organisation has a system of monitoring and recording staff training needs and skills. BSL skill level is recorded on that system. Staff understand their skill limitations and the organisation will not use people with BSL skills inappropriately: if a staff member with adequate BSL skills is not available to communicate (on a one-to-one basis) with a customer then a registered interpreter (IRP and/or ASLI Member) will be booked. The organisation is aware of the dangers of misinterpretation and the need to use registered interpreters.
- 2) People who can sign use 'practice sessions' to maintain their signing skills. These sessions are informal and in addition to attendance at courses. Resources are available for staff to practice BSL skills (for example, libraries, staff-room reading materials, on-line resources).
- 3) Taster courses in BSL are available to staff to motivate learning.
- 4) Organisations can demonstrate, through client feedback, the effectiveness of staff training and skills and will share feedback with Charter partners to share best practice in training and identify typical training needs.

## Pledge 5

### Consult with our local Deaf community on a regular basis

We are committed to...

1. At an early stage, seeking views of Deaf people and providing information, ideally face-to-face.
2. Meaningful involvement where the outcomes are recorded and evaluated, and fed-back to those involved.
3. Supporting Deaf people and their representatives so they can engage fully in the organisation's consultation processes.
4. Ongoing dialogue between the organisation and Deaf community.
5. Giving Deaf people the opportunity to influence the consultation/planning agenda.
6. Working in partnership with other organisations to streamline consultation processes and avoid consultation over-load on small community groups.

#### **Pledge 5 Suggested Evidence:**

- 1) Consultation will normally be face-to-face with an adequate provision of BSL/English interpreters. Non face-to-face consultation methods will make use of technologies such as SMS text, video-phone or web-cam. The organisation will provide support in the form of expenses and communication support for people involved in consultation.
- 2) Consultation events will be organised and advertised well in advance in order that interpreters can be booked and people can make arrangements to attend. Any written material used for consultation will be in plain English and given out before meetings (i.e. not 'tabled' at meeting). Feedback on what happened as a result of the consultation will be given in a clear and timely fashion (preferably by the person heading up the service/project being consulted on). Evaluation of the success and effectiveness of consultation will be based on the outcomes (i.e. whether an improvement to policy/service provision was made as a result of involving service users), not on the effectiveness of the consultation processes. Where improvements to services are requested as a result of consultation, these improvements are made in a timely manner.
- 3) If using 'representatives', these representatives: will have strong links into the community they represent; will have checked out the range of views in the community and will not be representing their own views; will have received training to enable them to be effective and representative. Where necessary, the organisation will provide training for representatives on

consultation, representation, the business of the organisation, and assertiveness, so that representatives can engage effectively.

- 4) Consultation will involve on-going dialogue between the organisation and Deaf community, and will not be restricted to one-off exercises. Citizens' Panels or Service User Panels will include Deaf people and ideally a Deaf sub-panel or user group will exist. The organisation will take part in the annual Devon SignVision conference.
- 5) Consultation will occur at an early stage of planning/decision-making (while it is still possible to influence the significant aspects of the outcomes).
- 6) Consultation standards are available to staff, incorporating Best Practice and BSL Charter commitments. Consultation processes are reviewed with partners.



**[www.devon.gov.uk/bslcharter](http://www.devon.gov.uk/bslcharter)**

For further information *or*

to receive this information in an alternative format or language

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