

BSL users to advise government on key issues for Deaf people

- Minister for Disabled People, Chloe Smith, launches recruitment for the British Sign Language Advisory Board
- Launch follows BSL Act recognising BSL as an official language in England, Scotland and Wales, which c. 151,000 people in the UK use
- For the first time in government applications will be accepted in BSL, and the Board will have both BSL and English as official languages

The Minister for Disabled People, Chloe Smith, has today launched recruitment for the newly formed British Sign Language (BSL) Advisory Board, which will see BSL users advising the government on key issues impacting the Deaf community.

Recognising BSL as an official language in England, Scotland and Wales for the first time, the BSL Act 2022 will make a considerable difference to people across the country. The new Board will provide personal and expert advice to the government on the implementation of the Act.

The Board's remit will be:

- advising on the use of BSL in public communications and policy delivery
- advising on how to tackle key issues facing Deaf people, such as how to increase the numbers of BSL interpreters

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Chloe Smith said:

The British Sign Language Act is helping to remove barriers faced by Deaf people in daily life and the Advisory Board is a key element of this important work.

The Board will help deliver better outcomes for the Deaf community by advising government on how to tackle key issues facing Deaf people, such as how to increase the number of BSL interpreters and making sure BSL is at the heart of government policy.

I would urge anyone with a passion for helping us create a more inclusive and accessible society to consider applying for a position on the Board.

Guidance will also be published on making public services more accessible to BSL users, and departments will report on how they are ensuring their communications are accessible.

The Board will be co-chaired by one external and one senior civil servant chair. The Board membership will comprise of at least 16 members plus the co-chairs, with a majority of Deaf BSL signers including Deafblind people and/or those who use tactile sign. For the Board members and the independent co-chair the main criteria for appointment will include a lived experience of BSL, alongside a willingness to work collaboratively in assisting the government to be more accessible.

The British Sign Language Bill, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Rosie Cooper MP, recognises BSL as a language of England, Wales and Scotland in its own right. It is supported by a duty on the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to report on what each relevant government department has done to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in its communications with the public.

The closing date for applications is 5pm on Friday 2 September 2022.

ENDS

- Full details on [how to apply to the Board](#).
- Recruitment is also open for the [Regional Stakeholder Network](#). Each of the 9 chairs will work with networks in their region and the Cabinet Office to ensure the voices of disabled people throughout England are heard and valued in a way that informs policy and strategy.
- Figures from the British Deaf Association suggest that 151,000 people use BSL in the UK, 87,000 of whom are Deaf.