



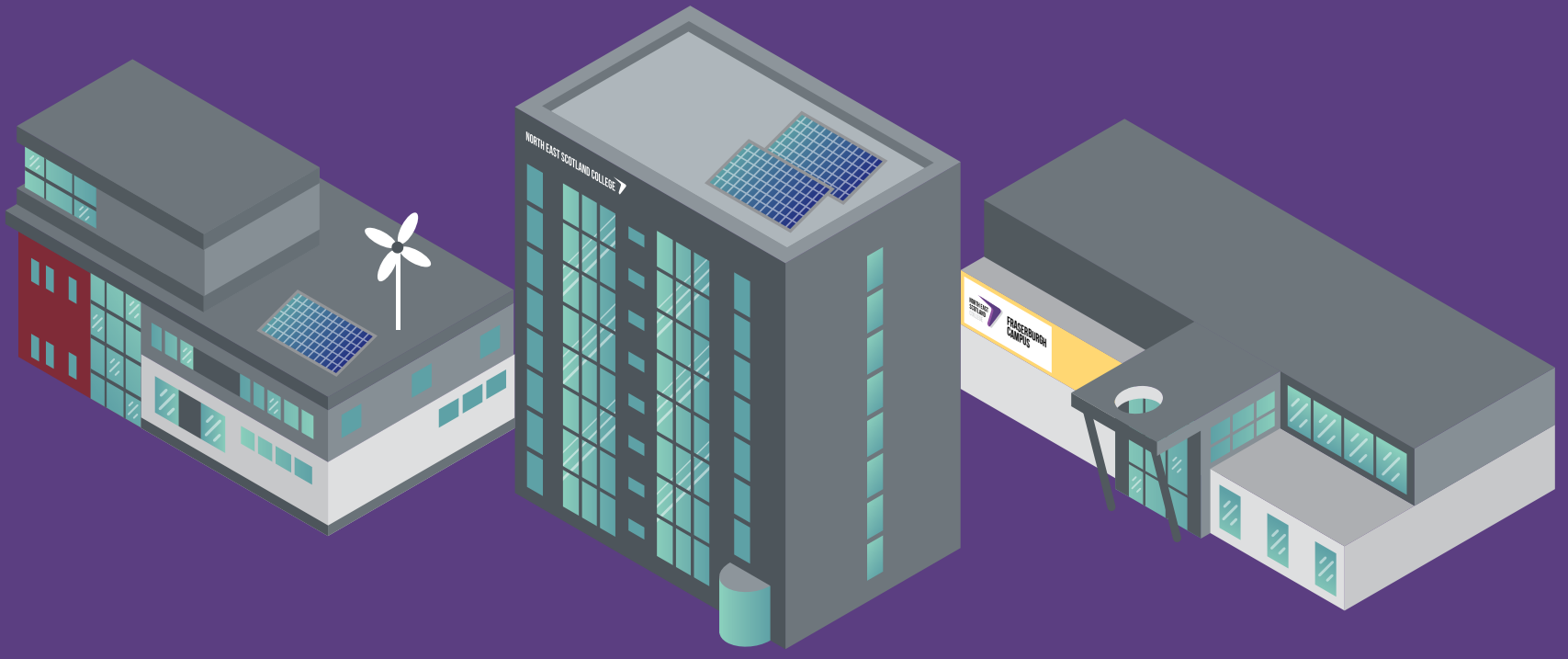
BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) PLAN

2024-2029



NORTH EAST
SCOTLAND
COLLEGE





4

LOCATIONS



21,000
STUDENTS



500+
COURSES



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INTRODUCTION

North East Scotland College British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2029

North East Scotland College's (NESCol) British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2029 sets out how we will strategically complement the ambitious work of the Scottish Government to ensure that Scotland is the best place in the world to live, work, learn and visit for BSL Users*

At NESCol we endeavour to create an environment where our BSL Community feel comprehensively supported and empowered to engage in work, learning or visitation of our campuses and spaces. This will be achieved through collaborative efforts with local organisations, the Students' Association, People Services (HR), the Student Advice and Support Team, Local Authorities and Trade Unions.

CONTEXT

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force in October 2015. The Act requires public bodies in Scotland to develop BSL Plans that outline how they will raise awareness, promote and support use of the language. In November 2023, the Scottish Government published its ambitious renewed BSL Plan 2023-2029. Each organisation's local plan must demonstrate how they will work towards implementing the national plan and improving services for BSL Users. It gives focus to 10 priority areas that include:

1. Delivering the BSL National Plan 2023-29
2. BSL Accessibility
3. Children, Young People and their Families
4. Access to Employment
5. Health and Wellbeing
6. Celebrating BSL Culture
7. BSL Data
8. Transport
9. Access to Justice
10. Democratic Participation



BSL USERS AT NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE

North East Scotland College has approximately 21,000 students studying each Academic Year. The number of users at NESCol declaring visual or hearing impairments as a disability to NESCol are generally low.

Declaration of Hearing Impairment		Declaration of BSL as a first language		Number of staff/ students seeking interpreter services	
20-21	0.32%	20-21	0.04%	20-21	0.004%
21-22	0.49%	21-22	0.07%	21-22	0.009%
22-23	0.55%	22-23	0.09%	22-23	0.009%
23-24	0.47%	23-24	0.02%	23-24	0.02%

North East Scotland College (NESCol) developed its inaugural BSL Plan spanning from 2017 to 2024. Substantial strides were taken towards enhancing NESCol's inclusivity through the implementation of Universal Design for Learning Initiatives, technological enhancements, and heightened awareness of BSL. Despite encountering the challenges posed by a global pandemic during the plan's duration, notable progress was achieved. Any outstanding actions from the initial plan will be carried forward and addressed in this BSL Plan.

The feedback garnered from BSL Surveys within our college community has been instrumental in guiding the trajectory of our initiative. The 2024-2029 BSL Plan will demonstrate our ongoing endeavours to understand, promote and facilitate BSL throughout Scotland. To ensure this is a priority focus at NESCol we have threaded our BSL ambitions through a number of existing plans and strategies.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Through the successful implementation of our whole-college approach to student support, all students are provided with more integrated and impactful support services that have improved communication and partnership working between the student and curriculum and student support teams. It should be noted that our ambitions are subject to a number of prevalent challenges, such as the limited availability of qualified interpreters in the North East of Scotland.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

NESCol's has an unwavering dedication to supporting our BSL community, to achieve this, it is essential to capture the experiences of people who are BSL Users to understand the barriers they face when working or studying in Further or Higher Education. The Annual Survey sent to staff and students provides some ongoing context and information to shape our work.

The approach to consultation has been collaborative, working with University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University (RGU), in addition to the community supported by Aberdeen Deaf Club North East Sensory Services, British Deaf Association (Scottish Branch) Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Trade Unions to gather feedback on what the local BSL Community requires from their Further and Higher Education Establishments.

1

Priority Area 1: Delivering the National Plan 2024-2029

To support the Government's ambitions of ensuring Scotland is the best place in the world to live, work, learn and visit for BSL Users, NESCol will;

- 1.1 Integrate the aspirations outlined in this plan into existing procedures and strategies to ensure continuous advancement throughout the organisation.
- 1.2 Delegate the responsibility and oversight of the BSL Plan 2024-2029 to the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee, tasked with monitoring and advancing the outlined actions.
- 1.3 Solicit feedback annually from the College community through a BSL Survey to assess progress and identify further necessary actions.
- 1.4 Publish a progress report on the BSL Plan in 2026, marking the halfway point of the plan's duration. This report will facilitate a comprehensive reflection on progress made and determine additional actions required to enhance the experience for our BSL Community.

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Priority Area 2: BSL Accessibility

The Scottish Government recognise that for many BSL users, BSL is their first language and services need to be accessible to users. It is our ambition to reduce and remove barriers to vital information, work and education. To achieve this, we will;

- 2.1 Improve the information and service for learners and prospective learners who use BSL, making our website and Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) more accessible to BSL Users.
- 2.2 Promote the use of nationally funded "Contact SCOTLAND-BSL", Scotland's BSL Online interpreting Video Relay Service.
- 2.3 Further promote additional supports available to applicants for work and study.
- 2.4 Continue to promote the use of technology to improve accessibility to all within our community.
- 2.5 Provide information, support, resources and training to staff and students to enrich knowledge, awareness and understanding.
- 2.6 Ensure continued adherence to compliance standards of all videos recorded and shared by the College.
- 2.7 Sustain the provision of opportunities for British Sign Language (BSL) learning via a variety of part-time courses.

3

Priority Area 3: Children, Young People and their Families

NESCol share the Government's vision of "Getting it right for every child" (GIRFEC) in supporting children and young people to reach their full potential. Our ambition is;

- 3.1 The Schools College Partnership Team will maintain close collaboration with local feeder schools to support transition planning to the College environment.
- 3.2 Our Student Advice and Support Teams will sustain close collaboration with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Social Work, and Through-Care After-Care partners to ensure thorough and quality transition planning.
- 3.3 Enhance awareness of available support services, encompassing financial support, transition assistance, mental health and wellbeing support, and learning support.

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Priority Area 4: Access to Employment

The Government's long-term goal is for BSL users to receive person-centred support to develop their skills, consider what route to employment is right for them and enter the workforce so that they can fulfil their potential and improve Scotland's economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career. NESCol will support both our students and staff by;

- 4.1 Continuing to raise awareness of "Developing the Young Workforce" (DYW) scheme and work-based learning opportunities for BSL Users.
- 4.2 Working in conjunction with regional partners, offering diverse opportunities throughout the academic year for students to interact with employers and acquire the essential skills needed for a successful transition into the workforce.
- 4.3 Raising awareness of Apprenticeships (e.g. Modern and Foundation).
- 4.4 Offering appointments to support with employability development skills.
- 4.5 Hosting Annual Careers Events at the 3 main campuses.
- 4.6 Supporting applicants selected for staff interviews to access support from BSL interpreting services.
- 4.7 Signposting and promoting access to work schemes and supporting our managers to make reasonable adjustments for staff.

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Priority Area 5: Health and Wellbeing

The College recently introduced our ambitious Wellbeing Strategy that aspires to improve the mental and physical health of the whole NESCol Community. We plan to;

- 5.1 Ensure the alignment of the BSL Plan with the Wellbeing Strategy.
- 5.2 Offer 24/7 counselling support services to all students.
- 5.3 Offer staff support through our Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- 5.4 Facilitate opportunities for both staff and students to enhance their physical and mental health in line with our "Active Campus" initiatives.
- 5.5 Promote fully accessible monthly webinars to our students that focus on priority health and wellbeing topics.
- 5.6 Provide regular opportunities for staff to access "Wellness Checks" and Flu Vaccinations on campus.
- 5.7 Facilitate opportunities to improve staff and student wellbeing through initiatives such as "Staff Wellbeing Day", the "Sparkle Winter Festival", "Brew Monday" and national/international awareness days.
- 5.8 Continuously evaluate and enhance the accessibility of our Wellbeing Support Information to all stakeholders.
- 5.9 Foster close collaboration with local NHS Services, Police Scotland and regional health & wellbeing partners to effectively advertise quality information and services on campus.

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Priority Area 6: Celebrating BSL Culture

Culture can improve the life chances of all people at every stage of their lives. NESCol recognise that BSL and deaf culture are intertwined. We plan to;

- 6.1 Continue to celebrate Deaf Awareness Week.
- 6.2 Work with our Students' Association to raise awareness and understanding of BSL Culture.

7 Priority Area 7: BSL Data

The long-term goal is to strengthen the evidence and data on the BSL Community in Scotland. This data will help to better inform decision making, service design and delivery. NESCol will endeavour to;

- 7.1 Improve data collection from staff, students and applicants to better understand needs and plan service delivery.
- 7.2 Collect robust data on BSL Interpreting requests and delivery to feedback to the relevant agencies.
- 7.3 Enhance systems to better identify those who require BSL Interpreter support.

8 Priority Area 8: Transport

Government ambitions are for all BSL users to have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport. NESCol shall:

- 8.1 Communicate transport information to students who commute to our campuses using public/college transport.
- 8.2 Seek opinion from our community through a range of feedback platforms and disseminate pertinent information to stakeholders as deemed appropriate.

9 Priority Area 9: Justice

BSL Users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice system in Scotland. NESCol's Safeguarding Team are available to support BSL Users access the justice system for support. We plan to:

- 9.1 Promote our Report + Support Tool that is available to all staff and students to make a disclosure.
- 9.2 As a Third Party Reporting Organisation, support staff and students make disclosures to Police Scotland.
- 9.3 Sustain the promotion of our "RESPECT" campaign aimed at heightening awareness regarding the standards expected within the NESCol community, and provide guidance on reporting procedures in instances where these standards are not upheld.

10 Priority Area 10: Democratic Participation

The Government's long-term ambition is for BSL users to be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland. NESCol will:

- 10.1 Through collaboration with our Students' Association, encourage applications from BSL users for various Students' Association positions and shall support their participation in the democratic process.
- 10.2 Likewise, comprehensive support will be extended to staff BSL users interested in running for roles such as Trade Union, Support Staff, or Teaching Staff Nominees on the Regional Board, ensuring adherence to democratic processes.



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British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact through:



The BSL version of this plan is available on the College website: [British Sign Language - North East Scotland College.](#)