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| Corporate Ref. | CPP017 |
| Level | Tier Two |
| Senior Responsible  Officer | Assistant Principal, Quality and Improvement |
| Version | 1.0 |
| EIA | 11 March 2023 |
| Approved by | SMT |
| Approved date | 28 March 2023 |
| Superseded version | N/A |
| Review date | March 2030 |



**British Sign Language**

Action Plan 2024 to 2030

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edinburgh College has a legal obligation to publish a British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan every six years as specified in the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. Our first action plan was published in 2018 and its implementation has been overseen by the BSL Plan Steering Group.

During the past six years, we have been successful in:

* increasing awareness of BSL and Deaf Culture within the College.
* improving the application and transition experience for BSL students.
* raising the standards of our teaching and learning support.
* delivering BSL classes across Edinburgh and Lothians.

To prepare for the new action plan, we consulted our BSL students and their support staff. The students are happy with their learning experience at the College, however they highlighted that the College could improve the communication process in any unplanned situations where interpreters needed to be reorganised e.g. timetable changes or strikes.

In the new 2024-30 plan, we set our actions in accordance with the Scottish Government BSL National Priorities and incorporate recommendations suggested by BSL users and our staff.

Please note that wherever we refer to ‘BSL Users’ in this plan, we mean d/Deaf and/or d/Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

## Purpose

This is the British Sign Language (BSL) plan for Edinburgh College, as required by the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. This plan sets out actions that Edinburgh College will take over the period of 2024-30 to fully support BSL users during their time studying or working on campus or interacting with Edinburgh College in any form.

The plan follows the [BSL National Plan](https://www.gov.scot/publications/bsl-national-plan-2023-2029/), which was published on 06 November 2023.

## Scottish Government BSL Plan

The Scottish Government recognises BSL as one of the languages of Scotland that is an integral part in the lives of many Scottish people. BSL is a vibrant and important language, with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Many Scottish citizens use this language to participate and contribute to our communities, our culture, and our economy.

The national plan aims to address the systemic issues that have been identified as key barriers to making Scotland the best place in the world for a BSL user to live, work, learn and visit. The Government has set out the Ten Priority Areas:

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

# STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

## Our Commitment

Edinburgh College is committed to creating a culture where all members of the College community are equally valued and respected, where diversity is celebrated and where everyone has the opportunity to fully take part in and benefit from their experience in the College.

All members and prospective members of the College have the right:

* To be treated with respect and dignity
* To be treated fairly
* To receive encouragement to reach their full potential

Edinburgh College will continue to take a collective responsibility to strive towards making our College an inclusive college for BSL users to study, work, and visit by promoting equality and diversity. The BSL Plan 2024-30 sets out our commitments in line with the ten National Priorities.

## Our Strategic Goals

The BSL Plan supports some of the College’s strategic goals as set out in the Edinburgh College 2023 Strategic Plan, ‘[Our Strategy Our Future](https://www.edinburghcollege.ac.uk/media/mpob0ysc/strategic-plan.pdf)’.

1. Give our students the best possible experience, so they can boost their confidence and take hold of the future they deserve.

* Staff and students will be happily engaged in their pursuit of excellence.
* We’ll enhance the wellbeing support offered to students and staff.

1. Support each other in an inspirational environment, so we can build our collective resilience and be proud of what we can achieve together.

* Our positioning as an inclusive college for all communities will gain lasting credibility.
* Diversity will expand within our student and staff communities.

## Our Equality Outcomes

Edinburgh College complies with the Equality Act 2010 General Equality Duty and its Specific Duties by publishing our mainstreaming report and a set of equality outcomes every four years and providing updates on our progress every two years.

# PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

## Progress of the 2018-24 Action Plan

The previous action plan was developed through extensive engagement with BSL users and supporting agencies. The ideas and suggestions from our former BSL students shaped the first plan in 2018.

**Increasing awareness of BSL Scotland Act and Deaf Culture.**

* Information about the BSL (Scotland) Act and Edinburgh College’s Action Plan are on the College’s website and is routinely promoted during Deaf Awareness Week.
* A training video on deaf awareness is available in teaching resources.
* Staff have opportunities to attend BSL classes including lunchtime course.
* Deaf awareness is part of staff’s CPD programme.
* An example of an awareness raising video shared on our social media [here](https://twitter.com/edinburghcoll/status/1390228561676603404?s=20).
* Information about [Contact Scotland BSL](https://contactscotland-bsl.org/) is promoted to all students and staff through College, ECSA and Equality newsletters.

**Improving the application and transition experience for BSL students.**

* Edinburgh College’s website is AA compliant in the current version of WCAG 2.1.
* Course information is written in Plain English as far as possible.
* Students can use the application system to notify the College of any support needs.
* When a student notifies the College that they require support, a meeting with the student is arranged to assess the support required. Recommendations or reasonable adjustment requirements are passed to relevant staff for implementation.
* The student induction process takes into account the disabilities or learning needs of students.
* The College has links with all Additional Support Needs (ASN) Leads. The transition of BSL students is part of the general learning support process.
* Student Experience Advisors provide one-to-one support for course, bursary or SAAS funding applications.
* Where required, arrangement can be made for a student to meet their Communication Support Worker (CSW), interpreter or teaching staff before their course begins.

**Improving the learning experience for BSL students.**

* Inclusive teaching is a key component of Learning and Teaching for teaching staff at Edinburgh College. This is included in PDA and TQFE courses which lecturers undertake as part of their staff induction or CPD training.
* The General Teaching Council for Scotland Guidance, which all lecturers are required to adhere to, includes the following in [Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland’s Colleges](https://www.cdn.ac.uk/professional-standards/): *‘Effective and inclusive practice and engagement with students and partners.’*
* Captioning is included in College videos which are available externally. A training video on captioning is available in teaching resources.
* Any reasonable adjustments required for learning are arranged by Learning Support and the Access Centre Manager.
* During lockdown, our teaching staff ensured BSL students were able to continue to learn online: [#ProudtobeEC - BSL classes adapt during COVID-19 (youtube.com)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d610So1E270).
* Between 2018 and 2023, the College had 250 to 300 d/Deaf or hard of hearing students each year. Three quarters of them studied part-time. The retention rates were above 90% and attainment rates were above 80%.

**Providing continuous support for BSL students.**

* Learning Support is responsible for managing CSWs or interpreting support and communications with professionals from external agencies.
* All students have access to the College’s counselling service. Interpreters are engaged as and when required.
* Any individual who is unhappy with College services, can make a complaint by completing a [compliment and complaints form](https://www.edinburghcollege.ac.uk/media/mqbj5nf1/compliment-and-complaints-form.pdf) and returning to [complaints@edinburghcollege.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@edinburghcollege.ac.uk). If anyone experiences difficulties in completing the form, they can email their complaint directly without completing the form.

**Ensuring BSL students are supported to access employment.**

* Career advice sessions are organised for BSL students on campus.

**Increasing access to BSL across Edinburgh and Lothians.**

* From 2018 to 2023, 464 students enrolled in the College’s BSL classes. Almost all of these students successfully achieved their awards.

# The 2024-30 Action Plan

The new plan has been developed in response to the Scottish Government BSL National Priorities. Similar to the previous plan, we consulted our BSL students, those who support them, and BSL language teaching staff in developing the actions.

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| **BSL National Priorities** | **Edinburgh College’s Actions** |
| **Deliver the BSL National Plan** | Improve the outcomes of BSL students and staff by implementing a College-wide BSL Plan. |
| **BSL Accessibility** | Improve the accessibility to our information, services, recruitment, enrolment, induction, learning, teaching and assessment for BSL users, and offer reasonable adjustments where we can. |
| **Children, Young People and their Families** | Continue to improve the transition of BSL pupils from schools into College, working together with parents/carers, schools, and support agencies. |
| **Access to Employment** | Work with careers advice and employment agencies to enable BSL students to reach positive destinations, and ensure the agencies engage with BSL interpreters when communicating with the BSL students.  Promote Edinburgh College’s inclusive employment practice and ensure BSL users or people with disabilities regard the College as an employer of choice. |
| **Health and Wellbeing** | Ensure all health and wellbeing support at the College is fully accessible to BSL students and staff. |
| **Celebrating BSL Culture** | Continue to provide accredited BSL classes within the curriculum at Edinburgh College.  Celebrate Deaf Awareness Week with all students and staff. |
| **BSL Data** | Continue to gather and publish data on protected characteristics in accordance with the Scottish Funding Council’s guidance. |
| **Transport** | Explore assistance with transport for those who may require it. |
| **Access to Justice** | Ensure BSL users can access the Report Hate and Misogyny or complaints processes, and receive adequate support from the College. |
| **Democratic Participation** | Ensure BSL students are supported fully when engaging in Students’ Association’s activities e.g. class reps or officers’ elections.  Ensure BSL users can access information on the College’s Board recruitment and are supported in the recruitment process. |

# GOVERNANCE

The Board of Management is responsible for the overall fulfilment of the College’s statutory equality duties and oversees the implementation of this action plan throughout the College.

The Senior Management Team is responsible for addressing the wider impact of the BSL Action Plan in the College and ensuring that all staff understand their responsibilities to follow and implement the plan.

Every member of the College community is responsible for following and implementing this plan aimed at fulfilling the statutory equality duties and our commitments to being an inclusive College.

# PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Access and Inclusion Strategy Group is responsible for advising, overseeing and monitoring the College’s progress in implementing this plan. This group meets once every two months during the academic year.

# CONTACT DETAILS

The lead officer for Edinburgh College’s BSL Action Plan is Nina Munday, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Lead and can be contacted if there are any questions or comments in relation to the plan.

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