

## Self-assessing your own use of languages

*How many languages do you know? And how fluent are you in each of them?*

In section 2 below you can see a grid which is used for any spoken language, though it also looks at literacy skills. After the spoken language grid you can see another one which is about BSL, though if you have another signed language, you can also substitute another language name for BSL, such as Irish Sign Language (ISL). These grids use the Common European Reference Framework for languages (CEFR).

Look at the first grid about English and put a tick in the cells which apply to you. If you have more than one spoken language, establish a colour code for each language. This will build up a profile of your strengths in each language. It is unusual for people to be completely balanced bilinguals. We also often use one language more in some contexts, such as informal or family ones.

Now look at the second grid about BSL and again tick the cells which apply to you. This is the most general level of signed language descriptors. There is a lot more detail in the Leeson et al. document which you can click through to find online. You can use the table below to check what your certificated level of BSL is. It may not be the same as your self-assessed level. You can click through to discover more about these awards (it is easier to click through from the pdf version of this document).

**Table: Comparing BSL qualifications and national / international levels**

SCQF level	SQA	Signature	CEFR
1			
2			
3	<a href="#">Award SCQF 3</a>		A1
4	<a href="#">Award SCQF 4</a>	<a href="#">Level 1: 101/102/103</a>	A2
5	<a href="#">Award SCQF 5</a>	<a href="#">Level 2: 201/202/203</a>	B1
6	<a href="#">Award SCQF 6 (21 UCAS points)</a>	<a href="#">Level 3: 320/321/322</a>	<b>B2</b>
7	<a href="#">H4Y634 Extended BSL (unit not award)</a>		
8	<a href="#">GE6Y48: PDA BSL Studies</a>	<a href="#">Level 4: 420/421/422</a>	Working towards C1
9			
10		<a href="#">Level 6: 601/602</a>	<b>C1</b>

Note that the CEFR levels are only formally mapped to Signature at Level 3 and Level 10. The other levels are not in bold, showing that they are likely but not yet mapped. SQA has not done this, so the matching to CEFR levels is likely but not ratified.

SCQF is Scottish Credit Qualification Framework used for all Scottish qualifications.

## Learning BSL

You may have reached a level of BSL such as SCQF 5, a common level for ToDs. At this level you are unlikely to be able to explain complex topics in BSL. You won't be able to improve the signing level of the children you work with who use BSL or SSE because you won't have the grammatical or lexical breadth or sophistication yet. Don't worry – you can improve and hopefully soon the Scottish Government will help with more funded BSL courses because of the [second national BSL plan](#) (see point 17). Just as in Gaelic Medium Education, teachers need support to reach fluency.

Here are some FAQs about learning BSL with responses I typically give:

1. *There are no intermediate or advanced classes near me.*

I suggest you first try to organise within your authority. Councils such as Dumfries and Galloway, a typical rural authority, has managed to put on a level 3 advanced BSL course for council employees, paying for the tutor to come from Glasgow. You could try to put such provision in the next version of your council's BSL plan.

Secondly, consider online courses. The advantage of going on an online course is that you will get to see a wider range of varieties of BSL. This can be also a disadvantage if you don't know the variety from your own local area.

2. *I don't have time to learn a language as well as studying on the ToD diploma.*

Think of language learning as a long-term project. You will probably take several years after qualifying as a TOD to become fluent. The action plan approach discussed here is useful for everyone because it helps you build in more contact with fluent language users into your everyday life.

3. *We don't have any BSL users in our authority. My mentor has never met any in 20 years. I don't think I need to learn BSL nowadays.*

There are many deaf children who have serious language delay; we know about them because we track their spoken language development. Language delay does a serious disservice to deaf children, preventing them from achieving academically. So not having any BSL users in your authority is a language policy from another era, before 2006 when newborn hearing screening and informed choices became the UK approach to working with families (See [Young et al., 2006](#)). It could well be that your mentor is very effective as a ToD with deaf children who use speech, but you need to aim for being able to teach the full range. This will take some years but it will mean families have actual choices, not theoretical ones.

4. *I can't find any resources about how BSL works as a language.*

The UK has an active research culture around BSL linguistics, led by DCAL in London (part of University College London). One of their resources is the [BSL SignBank](#) where you can see how signs are constructed, searching by sign features. You can watch dialogues from different age groups and BSL dialects from across the UK. Also worth investigating are online resources about BSL in BSL from [BSL SignWorld](#), a BSL teaching platform. They cost between £30 - £50 per year depending on your level. These are all helpful supplements to the input you will get from going to a BSL class and practising BSL with a wide range of deaf BSL users, friends and contacts.

## Creating a language learning action plan for yourself

Now write down some statements about the levels you think you are at with your languages. For example: *I think my level for BSL is A2. I think my average level for English is C1.*

- *Reflect* on your language resources and your role as a teacher of deaf children. Being multilingual is a real asset in this job because our pupils have varying language backgrounds.
- How can you improve your levels of spoken, written or signed language while you are on the course?
- As well as going on courses, think about maximising opportunities to interact with *fluent language users* and with complex texts in the target language.
- Make yourself an action plan about some specific actions you could take to reach your targets.

*Here is an example action plan:*

Target	How achieved	Dates achieved / review comments
I need to improve my receptive skills in BSL in formal and informal contexts. I need to get them up to B2 level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am friends with Trevor from the deaf club who is a very fluent BSL user so I will see if I can meet up with him at least once a month. I can offer a skills swap because I know he wants ongoing advice on sorting out his garden.</li> <li>• I will attend Edsign lectures online this year and any other formal BSL presentations I can find online.</li> </ul>	Review in June 2025
I need to improve my reading of academic texts in English while I am on the TOD diploma. I think I should be able to get to C2 level for reading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will have a go at using the Reading form for course readings because that will help me improve my comprehension.</li> <li>• I will set up a technical terms glossary for myself on my computer to keep track of all the new terminology and academic terms.</li> <li>• I will listen to podcasts and radio 4 programmes about language topics because I think this will help my reading comprehension too.</li> </ul>	Review May 2025
On my mum's side of the family, Urdu is a heritage language. I can use it at about A2 level, only in speaking and listening. I would like to get this up to B2 level eventually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will spend more time with my aunts and my mum when they are together as they speak Urdu between themselves.</li> <li>• I will find other Urdu speaking professionals in my local authority</li> </ul>	Review in September 2025

<p>because we do have Urdu speaking families regularly on our caseload. I am not so worried about the reading and writing.</p>	<p>– there is a Speech and Language Therapist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I will see if I can shadow her when she is working with children from Urdu speaking backgrounds. I would like to be able to assess deaf children’s spoken Urdu levels – but this may take some time.</li></ul>	
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You could share your action plan with colleagues at work.

Rachel O’Neill  
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## Section 2

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
<b>U N D E R S T A N D I N G</b>	<b>Listening</b>	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	<b>Reading</b>	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
<b>S P E A K I N G</b>	<b>Spoken Interaction</b>	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	<b>Spoken Production</b>	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
<b>W R I T I N G</b>	<b>Writing</b>	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

## Common Reference Levels: Global Scale for British Sign Language

Adapted from Leeson et al. (2016) [Sign Languages and the Common European Framework for Languages. Prosign.](#)

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually all BSL. Can summarise information from different sources and reconstruct arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express yourself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating nuances of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer BSL texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express yourself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed BSL on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex BSL on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native/proficient signers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed BSL on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points when clear, standard BSL [including a locally used variation] is used and the topics are familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise where BSL is used. Can produce simple connected BSL on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently-used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in BSL in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of your background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic BSL phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce yourself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details, such as where you live, people you know and things you have. Can interact in a simple way, provided the other person communicates slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.