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British Sign Language (BSL)

Hannah David looks at the new British Sign Language Act and the work PCS has been doing in producing free BSL sessions for our members.

British Sign Language (BSL) was only legally recognised as a language in 2022. This recognised many years of campaigning by the Deaf community and supporters, in acknowledging their language and the right to access public services such as health and education using sign language.

The BSL Act of 2022 created better recognition and understanding of BSL by:

- Legally recognising BSL as a language for England, Wales, and Scotland.
- Requiring government departments to report on how they are promoting and facilitating the use of BSL.
- Providing guidance to government departments and public bodies on how to meet the needs of people who use BSL as their first or preferred language.

It is so important that we make everything we do as a union as accessible as possible and having BSL interpreters to support members at events is always great to see. I have learnt a lot from deaf comrades about how meeting agendas and other events can be set up to help with accessibility. Small things like adding in frequent breaks to help with concentration fatigue, and limiting background noise, can make a difference for all of us!

Hopefully you have seen some of the actions that PCS has taken as a union to actively support deaf members, and the work that we are doing to champion the recognition and understanding of BSL.

We celebrated British Sign Language Day on 18 March, we have published blogs, set up taster courses and members' events for people to learn about and enjoy BSL themselves.

The PCS national disabled members' forum and learning department have run sessions for members to learn basic sign language such as finger spelling. These online sessions have been such a success that we invited Sarah Lawrence and Simon Deacy at Deaf Friendly to teach us in person at the national disabled members' seminar event in Birmingham.

Our online BSL sessions have been oversubscribed, showing how important this is to our members and how enjoyable these sessions have been. We will be running more of these sessions in 2024 so please keep in touch with new events coming up on PCS Digital and through the PCS website.

Hannah David, is national disabled members' forum chair and one of the national vice presidents.