



Deaf Awareness Week

3rd - 9th May 2021



In the UK 1 in 5 adults are deaf or have hearing loss. Around 150,000 people in the UK use British Sign language and 87,000 identify as being part of the Deaf Community.

Some people in the Deaf community choose to describe themselves as Deaf with a capital 'D' to express their pride in their Deaf identity.

Deaf History

Deaf History dates back over 10,000 years. It includes many historical figures including the Roman Emperor Hadrian, Beethoven and Helen Keller. Throughout history the Deaf community has experienced discrimination and hardships, including the lack of education and social exclusion.

At the centre of Deaf History is sign language.

British Sign Language

British Sign Language (BSL) is the language of the Deaf community in the UK. It has its own set of social beliefs, behaviours, art, history and values. BSL is a language in its own right and is often the first language for many people who are Deaf.

BSL is a visual form of communication which uses hands, facial expressions and body language. BSL has its own grammar and structured that is completely different from English. It is a visual-spatial language which evolved over time, as all languages do and has regional and local differences.

One element of BSL is **fingerspelling**. Fingerspelling uses different hand shapes to represent the letters of the alphabet and is used for names of people or places.

Some people use Sign Supported English (SSE) which is not a language but uses the same grammar and structure as English.

BSL has had a long and often tumultuous history. Even today there are several education system that continue to promote **oralism** as a default and suppress the use of sign language in a classroom.

There are four basic components to BSL:



Handshape:
how you hold your fingers and thumbs.



Movement:
of your hand through a defined space.



Non-manual features:
facial expression and shoulder movement.



Spatial-orientation:
the relationship of the hand to the signer's body.

BSL recognition: a timeline

- 1698: Digiti Lingua, a book written by an anonymous Deaf author is published. It contained manual alphabet charts, which laid the foundation for the BSL two-handed alphabet.
- September 1880: sign language is banned in all education settings across the UK, following the [infamous Milan Second International Congress](#).
- 1979: the National Union for the Deaf is formed. This group laid the foundations for the BBC's See Hear television series.
- 1999: The first BSL march of the Campaign for the Recognition of BSL takes place in London.
- 18 March 2003: British Sign Language is formally recognised as a language in England, Scotland and Wales.
- 30 March 2004: BSL and ISL are formally recognised as languages in Northern Ireland.
- October 2015: The British Sign Language Scotland Act comes into force, [legally recognising BSL](#). Scotland's BSL Act, however, does not apply to England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Communication Support

People who are deaf or have hearing loss may need [communication support](#) to enable them to communicate during appointments, meetings, interviews or at events. There are different types of communication support including:

- Sign Language interpreters
- Deafblind interpreters and communicator guides
- Speech to Text Reporters
- Lipspeakers
- Manual notetakers

Communication Support can be booked through RNID's [Louder than Words](#) team.

There are useful online tools available if you require last minute support while communicating with someone who is deaf or has hearing loss including live [speech-to-text apps](#) or video interpreting such as [InterpreterNow](#).

For more information, please contact our national Information Line:

Call: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 900

Email: information@hearingloss.org.uk

Or Live Chat on our [website](#)

For information in BSL, you can book an appointment here: [BSL Information Line](#)