



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Sign Language in the Mainstream Curriculum in Six Jurisdictions

Research Report



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May 2024

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Executive summary

The Irish Sign Language Act 2017, which formally commenced in December 2020, officially recognised Irish Sign Language (ISL) as a native and independent minority language. It gave Deaf people the right to access public services in their native language and included requirements for public bodies to prepare and implement action plans on ISL. It also outlined the need for better access to education through ISL for the approximately 40,000 ISL users in Ireland, including 5,000 Deaf people for whom ISL is the first and/or preferred language. On 14 November 2022 the Ministers for Education and for Special Education announced the first phase of implementation of the ISL scheme in schools, providing in-school support for students who are Deaf and whose primary means of communication is ISL. It is in this context that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) commissioned desk research to investigate how the teaching of Sign Language is conceptualised, described and provided for through the mainstream curriculum in six international jurisdictions: Australia: Victoria, Canada: Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland, USA: Kentucky, and Wales.

The research aims to provide comparative analysis of mainstream curriculum provision for Sign Language, examining the vision, aims, principles and priorities underpinning the inclusion of Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum; the place and organisation of Sign Language in the curriculum; stages of development and progression in Sign Language learning; assessment and planning for progression; and the key enablers/pedagogy for effective Sign Language learning across the six jurisdictions.

Methodology

The desk research adopted a two-stage methodology: the collection of information for each individual jurisdiction to provide detailed responses to the research questions, followed by second-stage analysis and synthesis to produce this key findings report. The study recognises that making comparisons of international curricula is not straightforward, given the diversity of education systems and the socio-cultural and political contexts in which they are embedded. It takes account of the complexities involved, aiming to reflect and accommodate individual disparities of approach across the jurisdictions while also allowing comparisons across and between them. It is intended to provide an evidence base to inform potential future ISL curriculum development in Ireland, not to put forward 'best practice' examples.

Sign Language in the six jurisdictions

There are four principal Sign Languages in the six jurisdictions: American Sign Language (ASL), Australian Sign Language (Auslan), British Sign Language (BSL), and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). ASL is used in both the United States and Canada, and BSL is the first language of many Deaf children and young people in Scotland, and in Wales.

There are nuances in the way Sign Languages are recognised across the jurisdictions where they may, for example, be an official language, a language of instruction, a minority language, or a language in their own right. In all six jurisdictions, Sign Language is recognised as a community language – the first or preferred language of the distinctive linguistic and cultural community of people who are Deaf.

Visions, aims and principles for Sign Language learning

While the six jurisdictions identify a range of aims, priorities and principles for Sign Language learning in schools, there is a key focus on improving access to Sign Language for both Deaf and hearing learners, and on improving communication and cross-cultural understanding between Deaf and hearing communities. Wider priorities include that the cross-cultural understanding that results from Sign Language learning contributes towards learners' broader understanding of the different perspectives, attitudes and values of other cultures, and their appreciation of human diversity at local, national and international levels, and so develops their overall understanding of equality, social justice and social cohesion. Development of skills, knowledge and understanding in Sign Language can also consolidate learners' overarching language, literacy and communication skills, and cultivate the intellectual skills and broader capacities and capabilities for future life.

The Sign Language curriculum

Frameworks are in place to allow both Deaf and hearing students to study Sign Language in all six of the jurisdictions included in the desk study. Sign Language is available in the mainstream curriculum in all phases of education in Victoria, New Zealand and Kentucky; intended to be offered to 3- to 16-year-olds under the Curriculum for Wales; can be offered from Primary 1, age 5+ to age 18 in Scotland; and is available in the high school curriculum (for 14- to 18-year-olds) in Ontario. Studied as an option at senior secondary level in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland and Kentucky, Sign Language can also contribute towards senior secondary qualifications or high school graduation, and consequently influence a learner's post-school career.

Across the jurisdictions, although the terminology may vary (Language Other Than English, LOTE; second language; world language; international language), Sign Language is generally offered to learners as a foreign language in the mainstream curriculum. In New Zealand, for example, it is

positioned as a language of choice alongside other (spoken) languages in mainstream schools and early childhood settings.

Content is variously set out as curriculum strands and/or sub-strands (Victoria, Ontario and New Zealand), goals and standards (Kentucky) and 'statements of what matters' (Wales). Deaf community and Sign Language culture is a strong theme running through curriculum content, and curriculum guidance documents across the jurisdictions emphasise the interrelatedness of the various content strands. In Victoria, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales, the organisation of curriculum content for Sign Language reflects the organisation set out for other international languages, and in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, the Sign Language curriculum is also intended to contribute to the development of the wider skills set out in the curriculum frameworks.

Curriculum content is also organised by pathways. There may be one pathway/curriculum document for all learners (e.g. in New Zealand and Wales), or separate curriculum pathways for first language (usually Deaf) and second language (usually hearing) learners (e.g. Victoria and Kentucky). Whatever the framework, the onus is on teachers to differentiate curriculum content to cater for the diversity of learner experience.

Stages of development and progression in Sign Language learning

The curriculum framework documents for Sign Language identify stages of development/principles of progression for the learning of the language, set out as content descriptions and achievement standards in Victoria, overall and specific expectations in Ontario, achievement objectives in New Zealand, sample progress indicators in Kentucky, and progression steps in Wales.

Although progression in Sign Language learning in Victoria, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales is expressed along a continuum which is broadly age-related, the curriculum frameworks are clear that progress will depend on when learners begin to learn the language, and on their previous experience, which can vary considerably. As a consequence, the age ranges linked to stages of development and progression need to be viewed more flexibly than might be the case for other subjects, such as maths, where students begin learning at the same age. In Sign Language learning, progress is less likely to be age-related and students may not achieve at the higher levels where they begin to learn the language at secondary level.

Assessment

As with all curriculum subjects, assessment plays a fundamental role in monitoring learner progression in Sign Language learning. Jurisdictions provide guidance, in the form, for example, of

achievement charts in Ontario, scope and sequence charts in Victoria, and assessment tasks or sample assessment resources within qualification specifications in Victoria and New Zealand, to support assessment of student learning and enable teachers to make consistent judgements about the quality of learning. In addition to school-based (internal) assessment, which usually takes place once teachers judge that their students have developed the knowledge and skills required, end-of-year/end-of-course examinations are a feature of assessment in Sign Language learning in Victoria and Ontario.

Like Sign Language curriculum content, assessment is intended to accommodate the potential diversity in students' Sign Language learning experiences and ability.

Pedagogy/key enablers for Sign Language learning

Key features of Sign Language pedagogy highlighted in curriculum guidance for the teaching and learning of Sign Language in mainstream education in the six jurisdictions include maximising Sign Language use in the classroom and the wider school environment; varying instructional strategies and approaches; reflecting Sign Language culture in teaching and learning experiences; and considering specific aspects of teaching a visual-spatial language, such as use of space and semi-circles in classroom organisation.

Authenticity is a key thread running through Sign Language pedagogy: the authenticity of learning opportunities that make learning relevant to students' individual motivations for learning the language, authenticity in access to high-quality Sign Language learning resources which originate from the Sign Language/Deaf community, and the authenticity that comes from ensuring that teaching and learning experiences involve real-life connections and liaison with the Sign Language/Deaf community. This collaboration is crucial not only in implementing teaching and learning but also when designing and developing the curriculum.

Key enablers for effective Sign Language teaching and learning also include the availability of suitably qualified teachers and/or external specialist expertise, and of technology. The latter can play an important role, both in enabling access to authentic learning experiences with first language Sign Language users where face-to-face experiences are not possible, and in facilitating access to external expertise, such as qualified Sign Language teachers or instructors.

Conclusions and implications: considerations for Sign Language learning

This desk study of mainstream curriculum provision for Sign Language in Australia: Victoria, Canada: Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland, USA: Kentucky, and Wales is intended to inform NCCA's thinking

for the direction of development of Irish Sign Language (ISL) learning in schools. Given the international trend towards the recognition of Sign Languages, it will also be of interest to policy makers and curriculum developers elsewhere, responsible for Sign Language in the curriculum.

In examining the characteristics of policy and provision in the six jurisdictions, the research has highlighted 12 key issues for consideration when incorporating the opportunity to study Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum. These include:

- What should be the key aims, priorities and principles for Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum and how might these be articulated across all phases of education?
- In introducing Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum, is it feasible to have one curriculum framework or pathway to accommodate all learners, regardless of their Sign Language heritage?
- How could a curriculum for ISL best integrate and align with existing language curricula in primary and post-primary education?
- Should Sign Language qualifications co-exist with the curriculum framework and contribute towards certification for post-secondary/tertiary education?
- What will be the key enablers to teaching and learning of Sign Language in the curriculum/what resources will be needed in support?
- How do we ensure the availability of appropriately skilled and qualified Sign Language teachers and how do we define appropriately skilled/qualified?
- Which stakeholders would we need to work with in planning, implementing and supporting the Sign Language curriculum?

The desk study evidence provides a starting point for the discussion and consideration of such questions. In reflecting on these and other questions in relation to the evidence from the study, it is important to consider the context in the six jurisdictions. Each is unique. While this key findings report reflects some of the important common threads in how the six jurisdictions provide opportunities for the teaching and learning of Sign Language, and some of the important nuances, the individual jurisdiction descriptions, which provide the basis for the key findings report, reflect this all-important context and the nuances in further detail.

1. Introduction and context

1.1 Context for the research

The Irish Sign Language Act 2017, which formally commenced in December 2020, officially recognised Irish Sign Language (ISL) as a native and independent minority language. It gave Deaf people the right to access public services in their native language; included requirements for public bodies to prepare and implement action plans on ISL; outlined the requirement for more trained ISL interpreters; and included provisions for a scheme to provide access to interpreting for cultural and social activities, and to make changes to the accessibility standards of broadcast media. The Act also highlighted the need for better access to education through ISL for the approximately 40,000 ISL users in Ireland, including 5,000 Deaf people for whom ISL is the first and/or preferred language. On 14 November 2022, the Ministers for Education and for Special Education announced the first phase of implementation of the ISL scheme in schools, providing in-school support for students who are Deaf and whose primary means of communication is ISL. It is in this context that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) commissioned desk research to investigate how the teaching of Sign Language is conceptualised, described and provided for through the mainstream curriculum in six international jurisdictions.

1.2 Research methodology

The desk study aims to provide comparative analysis of mainstream curriculum provision for Sign Language in response to the following research questions. From the curriculum frameworks or policy in place:

- What is the expressed aim, vision or intention for Sign Language learners, and what principles underpin the curriculum in Sign Language?
- Where does Sign Language sit within the broader curriculum and policy frameworks and how does it relate to other languages in the curriculum?
- Are stages of development in Sign Language evident and what are the essential indicators at each stage?
- What guidance is provided on assessing and planning for progression in Sign Language learning?
- How is pedagogy for Sign Language described and what features of Sign Language pedagogy can be identified?

The research focuses on six jurisdictions (Australia: Victoria, Canada: Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland, USA: Kentucky, and Wales), each of which includes the teaching and learning of Sign Language to some degree in the mainstream curriculum. The jurisdictions were selected in collaboration with NCCA to provide evidence from a range of perspectives and contexts; from jurisdictions which have included Sign Language in the curriculum for some years (e.g. Victoria) and those for whom it is relatively new (e.g. Ontario and Wales); and from jurisdictions for which information is readily available in the English language. This has the advantage that the source

documents reviewed for the desk research will be readily accessible to NCCA colleagues, and to others interested in the further detail of the desk study, should they wish to interrogate those documents.

The focus is on jurisdictions rather than countries because, in federal countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA, state or territory education ministries have responsibility in particular areas of education. Where possible, this desk research does, however, reflect the national perspective also, for example, in Australia, where individual states and territories adapt and interpret national curriculum guidelines, and in the USA, where the guidelines for teaching American Sign Language are developed at national level.

The desk research adopted a two-stage methodology: the collection of information for each individual jurisdiction to provide detailed responses to the research questions, followed by analysis and synthesis to produce this key findings report looking across the jurisdictions.

All information for the study comes from publicly available sources, such as strategy and policy documents for Sign Language and Sign Language education, and curriculum framework and guidance documents published by education ministries and/or by curriculum/assessment agencies. Specialist colleagues in Victoria, New Zealand and Wales also provided additional contextual and background information. Full references for all sources are included in the individual jurisdiction descriptions produced during the first stage of the research, and all evidence sources relevant to this key findings report are referenced in Section 8.

A note on cross-jurisdiction analyses/international comparisons

Making comparisons of international curricula is not straightforward, given the diversity of education systems and the socio-cultural and political contexts in which they are embedded. This desk research takes account of the complexities involved, aiming to reflect and accommodate individual disparities of approach across the six jurisdictions while also allowing comparisons across and between them. It is intended to provide an evidence base to inform potential future ISL curriculum development in Ireland, not to put forward 'best practice' examples.

1.3 Sign Language in the six jurisdictions

Table 1: The Sign Languages

The Sign Languages

Australian Sign Language (Auslan)	Australia, including Victoria
American Sign Language (ASL)	Canada, including Ontario USA, including Kentucky
British Sign Language (BSL)	Scotland Wales
New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)	New Zealand

There are four principal Sign Languages in the six jurisdictions, with American Sign Language (ASL) used as a primary means of communication by many Deaf people in both the United States and Canada, and British Sign Language (BSL) being the first language of many Deaf children and young people in Scotland, and in Wales.

The Sign Languages are individual visual-spatial or visual-gestural natural languages, with their own grammar and vocabulary, in which hands/handshapes; eye gaze; facial expressions; and arm, head and body postures, gestures and movements are used to convey meaning, thoughts and emotions.

There are nuances in the ways in which Sign Languages are recognised across the jurisdictions, as summarised in Table 2.

Sign Language has been recognised as an official language in New Zealand and Ontario since 2006 and 2007 respectively, and in Scotland since 2015. In New Zealand, it is an official language alongside English and *Te Reo Maori*, and in Ontario, where Sign Language is recognised as a fundamental human right of members of the Deaf community as a distinct cultural-linguistic society, *Langue des Signes Québécoise* (LSQ) (Quebec Sign Language) and First Nations Sign Language (*Langue des Signes*) are also recognised¹.

¹ This desk research has focused on American Sign Language (ASL) as that documentation is available in English.

Regulation 298 of the Ontario Education Act also recognises ASL as a language of instruction, allowing teachers to use ASL in the classroom if the pupil understands the language. The intention of the regulation (originally introduced in 1990) was to encourage school boards to make all reasonable efforts to offer ASL as a language of instruction for Deaf or hard of hearing learners, alongside the other possible languages of instruction - English, French and LSQ/*Langue des Signes*, as this is regarded as critical to supporting the well-being of learners and to enhancing linguistic justice and equity.

The USA does not identify any language (whether signed or spoken) as an official language. ASL may, however, be a language of instruction, as the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires mainstream schools to provide education for Deaf or hard of hearing students through their preferred means of communication or their native language, and this may be ASL. Some US states also recognise ASL as a foreign/world language in education, as is the case in Kentucky.

Although BSL is recognised as a language in its own right in Wales, and defined as an indigenous minority language, it is not legally recognised as a regional or minority language. As a result, it does not have the same legal protections as Welsh, for example.

In all six jurisdictions, Sign Language is recognised as a Deaf community language. The national policy on languages for Australia (Lo Bianco, 1987), for example, identifies Auslan as a stable language which shares many of the characteristics of community languages and which has been evolved by the ‘communication disabled, particularly Deaf people’ (page 8). Auslan is also recognised as a community language by the Victorian Government in its language services policy and guidelines (2018), which aim to ensure that those who use a form of Sign Language – particularly Auslan – can access services and participate in decision-making processes.

Table 2: Recognition of Sign Languages

Sign Language is recognised as:	
An official language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada: Ontario (ASL/LSQ) • New Zealand (NZSL) • Scotland (BSL)
A language of instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada: Ontario (ASL)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA: Kentucky (ASL)
<p>A community language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The preferred language of the Deaf community - The national language of the Deaf community/Deaf New Zealanders - The first or preferred language of the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are Deaf - The first language of many Deaf children and young people - The primary means of communication/first language of many members of the Deaf community - A community language other than English/the signed language of the Deaf community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia (Auslan) • New Zealand (NZSL) • New Zealand (NZSL) • Scotland and Wales (BSL) • Canada: Ontario and USA: Kentucky (ASL) • Australia: Victoria (Auslan)
An indigenous minority language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wales (BSL)
A language in its own right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia (Auslan) • Canada: Ontario (ASL/LSQ) • Scotland (BSL) • Wales (BSL)
A unique language with equal status to spoken language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand (NZSL)
A world language in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA: Kentucky (ASL)

2. Aims and priorities for Sign Language learning

In the context outlined in Section 1.3, the six jurisdictions identify a range of aims, priorities and principles for Sign Language learning in schools. These may be set out in curriculum framework or guidance documents, in qualifications specifications or, as is the case in Scotland and New Zealand, also in a national plan or strategy for Sign Language. Table 3 provides an overview of

the documents in which the aims and priorities are set out; Table 4 a summary of the visions, intentions and principles as expressed in each of the documents.

Table 3: Documents setting out the aims and priorities for Sign Language learning

Aims, priorities and principles for Sign Language learning set out in:	
Australia: Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Language Program: a brief guide to Auslan (ages 4-5) • Victorian Curriculum F-10 for Auslan (ages 5-16) • Study Design for Auslan as a Language Other Than English (LOTE) in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) (ages 16-18)
Canada: Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Sign Language (ASL) as a Second Language curriculum for Grades 9-12 (ages 14-18)
New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) in the New Zealand Curriculum guidelines • New Zealand Sign Language Board's Sign Language Strategy 2018-2023
Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan for Scotland 2017-2023 • Specifications for BSL qualifications (ages 14/15+)
USA: Kentucky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Standards for World Languages • Standards for Learning American Sign Language (ASL) as a second (world or modern) language (ages 5-18)
Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum for Wales guidance for the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience (AoLE), including British Sign Language (BSL) (ages 3-16)

Table 4: Aims, priorities and principles for Sign Language learning

Jurisdiction	Set out in:	The teaching and learning of Sign Language aims to:
Australia: Victoria 	Early Childhood Language Program: a brief guide to Auslan (ages 4-5)	Help both Deaf and hearing children to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop their overall literacy and understanding of how language works • develop their brain development, cognitive flexibility, memory retention and motion processing • develop their educational and personal development, self-esteem and well-being • strengthen their cultural identity and increase their enjoyment in communicating.
	Victorian Curriculum F-10 for Auslan (ages 5-16)	Contribute to the overall intellectual and social enrichment of both first language (Deaf) and second language (hearing) learners by enabling them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to communicate in Auslan • understand language, culture and learning and their relationship, and develop an intercultural capability in communication, an understanding and respect for others, an appreciation of diversity and an openness to different perspectives and experiences • understand themselves as communicators, by broadening understanding that each language is an integrated, evolving system for the framing and communication of meaning

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop an understanding of the nature of identity, the cultural and social assumptions that underpin their world view, and the role of language as an expression of cultural and personal identity and a shaper of perspectives • develop a knowledge and understanding of the diversity of Deaf experience and insight into the rich cultural heritage of the Deaf Community • develop critical thinking skills and the ability to adapt to change • develop learning strategies and study habits that are the foundation for lifelong learning and subsequent language learning.
	<p>Study Design for Auslan in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) (ages 16-18)</p>	<p>Contribute to the overall education of Deaf and hearing students, particularly in the areas of communication, cross-cultural understanding, literacy and general knowledge, and to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote understanding of different attitudes and values within the wider Australian community and beyond • develop understanding of the relationship between Deaf and hearing cultures, and an understanding and appreciation of the cultural contexts in which Auslan is used • facilitate communication between Deaf and hearing communities, and help maintain and share the cultural and linguistic heritage of Deaf and hearing Australians • provide learners with enhanced vocational opportunities and the ability to apply Auslan to work, further study, training or leisure • develop learners' understanding of language as a system, and their cognitive, learning and social skills.
<p>Jurisdiction</p>	<p>Set out in:</p>	<p>The teaching and learning of Sign Language aims to:</p>

Canada: Ontario



American Sign Language (ASL) as a Second Language Curriculum for Grades 9-12 (ages 14-18)

- increase second language learners' ability to use ASL effectively
- enhance understanding of the language and identity of those who use ASL in Ontario, and of ASL speakers' senses of self, of membership, of culture, and of humanity
- encourage learners to develop respect for human diversity and increase understanding of other cultures generally
- strengthen learners' first language skills and their knowledge and skills for lifelong language learning
- develop learners' ASL language, literacy and cultural knowledge, their metalinguistic knowledge and metacognitive skills, and their understanding of the connections between ASL language, culture, community and identity, and of the historical and current contexts of the ASL community's perspectives and contributions
- play a valuable role in learners' broader education, by enhancing their critical and creative thinking abilities, enabling them to understand their own identity, to learn to express themselves with confidence, and to develop their problem-solving skills.
- provide an advantage in a number of careers, both in Canada and internationally, by enabling learners to gain transferable skills such as risk-taking and using trial and error as part of the learning process
- enable learners to value equity by examining inequity, social justice and discrimination against the ASL community, and understand how this has led to social and political action and legislative change

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop learners’ skills, strategies and understanding to effect change and participate as responsible and socially conscious citizens in local and global communities • develop linguistic abilities which benefit the individual and Canadian society through the development of a multilingual and culturally sensitive workforce.
Jurisdiction	Set out in:	The teaching and learning of Sign Language aims to:
<p>New Zealand</p> 	<p>New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) in the New Zealand Curriculum guidelines</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable increased access to NZSL for Deaf and hard of hearing students from the earliest possible age • extend opportunities to hearing students to learn NZSL, develop an appreciation and understanding of Deaf culture in the New Zealand context, and interact with other users of the language • increase the pool of fluent NZSL users • enhance participation in education by those whose first language is NZSL and enable them to develop and learn their language within the national curriculum framework • promote and encourage the learning of NZSL and Deaf culture and enable collaboration with Deaf communities throughout New Zealand • enable learners to develop communication skills for a range of purposes and become confident in communicating with users of NZSL as a first language • extend understanding of New Zealand as a country with diverse linguistic patterns and cultural perspectives, and contribute towards the protection of linguistic diversity worldwide

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broaden understanding of people and their languages and cultures, and extend understanding of Deaf culture in national and international contexts • enable learners to develop a sense of identity in relation to the Deaf community and other NZSL users, and to consider their own identity and assumptions • enable learners to increase their understanding of their first language/other languages and culture(s), through becoming aware of how they resemble and differ from NZSL, and to develop their understanding of the power of language and the cognitive tools and strategies to learn further languages • enable the acquisition of skills, attitudes and understandings that may be extended in other learning areas • broaden the range of employment options for NZSL learners.
	New Zealand Sign Language Board's Sign Language Strategy 2018-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that Deaf children and young people who use NZSL are learning and acquiring NZSL at age-appropriate levels throughout their education • enable families to learn NZSL throughout their child's education and communicate more easily with their Deaf child • ensure that professionals working in educational contexts are proficient in NZSL to an appropriate level.
Jurisdiction	Set out in:	The teaching and learning of Sign Language aims to:
Scotland 	British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan for Scotland 2017-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support children and young people who use BSL at all stages of their learning so that they can reach their full potential

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure parents who use BSL have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child’s education • enable more pupils to learn BSL at school <p>(Where schools have introduced BSL³, aims have included to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve communications, relationships and friendships among Deaf and hearing learners • improve learners’ experiences of school and learning • increase learners’ appetite to learn about different cultures • increase links with the wider Deaf community and national Deaf organisations.
	<p>Specifications for BSL qualifications (ages 14/15+)</p>	<p>Enable both hearing and Deaf learners to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop their language skills and communicate with BSL users in various contexts • develop their understanding of how Sign Languages work, and how they differ from spoken and written languages • enhance understanding of Scotland’s Deaf Community, its history, people and culture. <p>Enable learners who already use BSL to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop their ability to communicate clearly, think critically and use their own language creatively, and gain a deeper insight into the history and cultural heritage of BSL.

Jurisdiction	Set out in:	The teaching and learning of Sign Language aims to:
<p>USA: Kentucky</p> 	<p>Academic Standards for World Languages (including ASL)</p>	<p>Contribute towards increasing students' cognitive abilities, mental plasticity, adaptivity, openness to risk-taking, and understanding of how they fit in their communities locally and beyond and to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance cultural perspectives, traditions and knowledge • impact and enhance first language literacy • provide a social-emotional tool for students of multiple backgrounds • contribute towards students' overall academic preparedness, cognitive ability and college, career and community readiness • promote literacy and give opportunities for students to be biliterate or multiliterate.
	<p>Standards for Learning American Sign Language (ASL) as a Second (World or Modern) Language (ages 5-18)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage and facilitate the inclusion of ASL in the curriculum for second/additional language learners • provide new perspectives on the structure of human languages and, through the comparisons learners engage in while studying ASL, develop learners' English language skills and general communication effectiveness • enable learners to access the rich cultural heritage of the American Deaf community and learn how cultural values, beliefs and behaviours are expressed through language, art and literary forms • enable learners to communicate with Deaf people in work, professional, community and social settings, and lead students to career opportunities, as

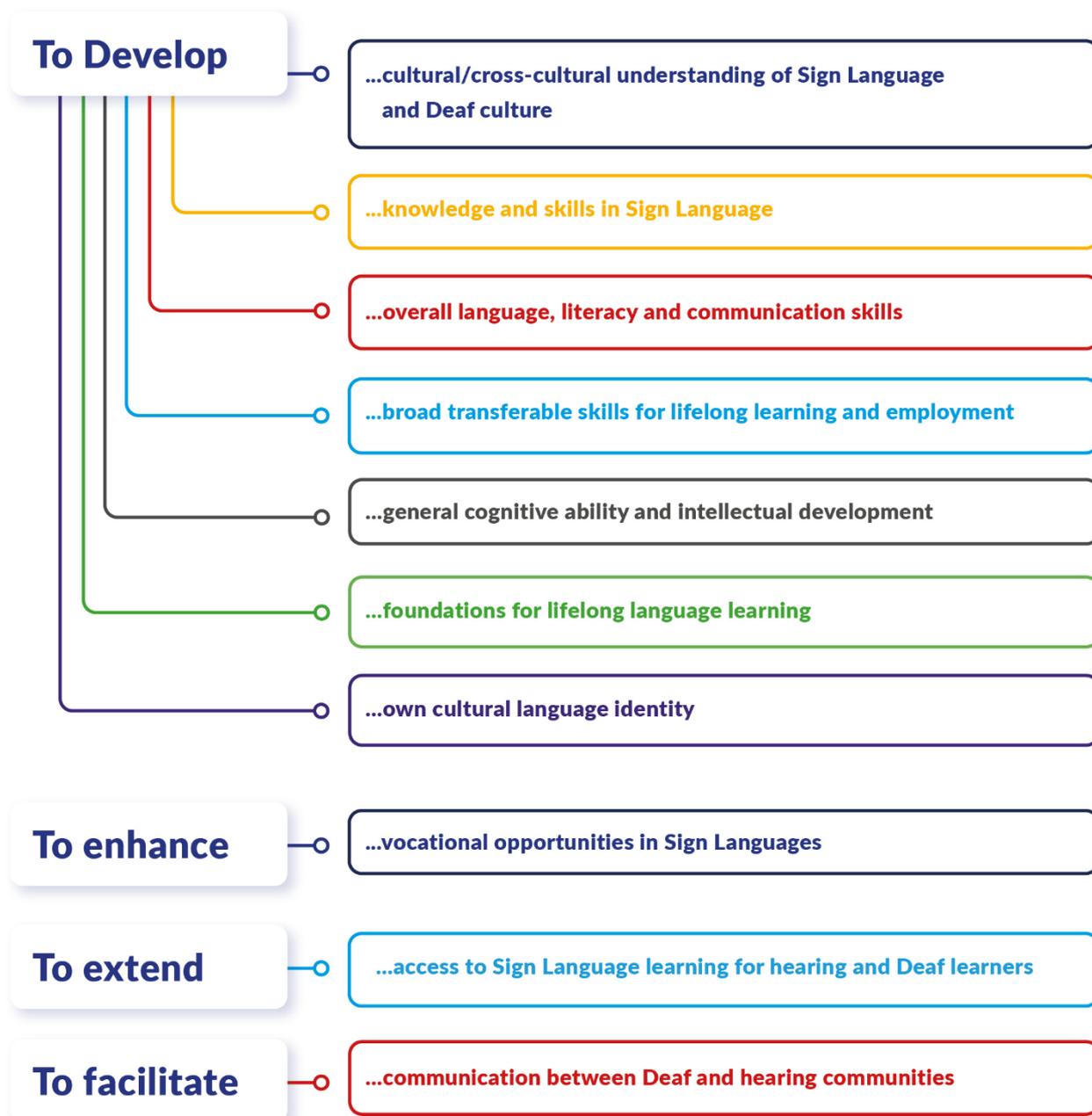
		<p>well as to using the language with neighbours, within the local community, throughout the United States and around the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> allow Deaf and hard of hearing students to have more effective communication with their peers.
Jurisdiction	Set out in:	The teaching and learning of Sign Language aims to:
<p>Wales</p> 	<p>Curriculum for Wales Guidance for the Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), including British Sign Language (BSL) (ages 3-16)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enable Deaf or hard of hearing BSL users and second, third or subsequent language BSL learners to learn BSL, regardless of their medium of education (Welsh or English), including learners with additional learning needs (ALN)⁴ support the education of children who are Deaf or hard of hearing, support learning and progression in BSL for hearing children who have Deaf parents, siblings and friends who use BSL, and help hearing children and young people communicate with Deaf classmates who use BSL enable learners to engage critically with languages to help them develop their own sense of identity, and to develop an understanding of the relationship between their own cultures and communities and those of other people enable learners to gain the linguistic knowledge and skills to help them to participate confidently and empathetically in society, and contribute to learners' development as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world improve social cohesion, local, national and global understanding enable learners to express themselves effectively, be open to other people's points of view, and develop positive relationships

- support human and children's rights by supporting inclusivity and understanding and respect for other people's rights and cultures
- enable learners to develop their personalities, talents and abilities, and to become multilingual (able to use BSL, Welsh, English and at least one other international language, which could be an international Sign Language such as ASL)
- enable learners to develop an openness to and curiosity about the languages and cultures of the world, and reflect on their personal and local linguistic heritage and identity as they become knowledgeable about the diversity of local, national and international linguistic and cultural heritage
- enable learners to enjoy learning languages and develop a firm foundation in BSL, Welsh and English to build on when learning other languages and when broadening their understanding of national and global contexts
- develop knowledge of the enhanced career opportunities available through BSL, and of BSL associated with work.

2.1 Common threads and nuances in aims and principles for Sign Language Learning

Table 4 (above) has highlighted some common threads in the aims, visions, principles and priorities for Sign Language learning across the six jurisdictions, including:

Figure 1: Common threads underpinning Sign Language Curricula



There is common emphasis in the visions and aims for Sign Language learning on promoting, encouraging and increasing access, that is to allow more opportunities for Sign Language learning in mainstream classrooms for both Deaf and hearing learners. This is expressed in New Zealand, for example, as an intention to increase the pool of fluent NZSL users and enhance participation in education by those whose first language is NZSL. In Wales, it is expressed as the desire to support the education of students who are Deaf or hard of hearing by increasing access to BSL, and to enable second, third or subsequent language BSL learners to learn the language.

There is also a focus, across the jurisdictions, on including the development of knowledge, skills and understanding in Sign Language in mainstream classrooms and curricula, with a view to improving and facilitating communication between Deaf and hearing learners. This is described in Wales as to support learning and progression in BSL for hearing children who have Deaf parents, siblings and friends who use BSL, and to help hearing children and young people communicate with Deaf classmates.

Incorporating Sign Language learning in the mainstream curriculum also aims to develop understanding of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Sign Language and Deaf communities, and of the identity of those who use Sign Language. There is a common vision that the cross-cultural understanding that results from such learning can also contribute towards a broader understanding of different perspectives, attitudes and values, and an appreciation of human diversity at local, national and international levels. The teaching and learning of ASL in the mainstream curriculum in Ontario, for example, while aiming to enhance understanding of the language and identity of those who use ASL, and of ASL speakers' senses of self, of membership, of culture, and of humanity, also aims to encourage learners to develop respect for human diversity and increase understanding of other cultures generally.

In Scotland, where the BSL qualifications for learners aged 14+ aim to enable both hearing and Deaf learners to develop their BSL language skills, develop their understanding of how Sign Languages work, and understand Scotland's Deaf community, its history, people and culture, the qualifications also aim to allow learners who already use BSL to develop their ability to communicate clearly, think critically and use their own language creatively, and gain a deeper insight into the history and cultural heritage of BSL.

Developing knowledge and skills in Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum can also contribute towards improving learners' overall language learning and literacy; their understanding of how languages work; the effectiveness of their communication skills; their skills for lifelong language learning; and their own language identity (Kentucky, New Zealand, Ontario, Victoria, Wales). The study of Sign Language can also develop broader cognitive and transferable skills, including

cognitive flexibility, academic preparedness, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving and adaptability, and contribute towards learners' social development and enrichment and their participation as responsible and socially conscious citizens (Kentucky, Ontario, Victoria, Wales).

In Ontario there is a particular intention, in the teaching and learning of ASL, to enable learners to value justice and equity by studying inequity, social justice and discrimination through the lens of the ASL community, and understanding how this has led to social and political action and legislative change. In Wales, there is an emphasis on languages, including BSL, being key to improving social cohesion and local, national and global understanding.

The teaching and learning of BSL in the mainstream curriculum in Wales aims to look beyond national borders in other ways too, through developing an openness to and curiosity about the languages, cultures and linguistic heritage of the world, and helping learners to become multilingual: able to use BSL, Welsh, English and at least one other international language, which could be an international Sign Language such as ASL. In New Zealand similarly, NZSL in the curriculum aims to develop an understanding of linguistic diversity worldwide, and of Deaf culture in national and international contexts, while in Kentucky, the Standards for Learning ASL as a second (world or modern) language look to enable learners to use the language 'with neighbours, within the local community, throughout the United States and around the world'.

Sign-language specific skills can also enhance learners' vocational opportunities and broaden their range of employment options and, as highlighted in Ontario, can not only develop linguistic abilities which benefit the individual, but society as a whole through the development of a multilingual and culturally sensitive workforce.

In Ontario, the foundation of student learning in ASL is also focused on a set of 'enduring ideas'. These emphasise the development of the knowledge and skills needed for lifelong language learning, and include competencies and habits of mind that are also intended to equip students with the tools to participate effectively in a changing global society. They mirror those for other international languages and are - an authentic approach to ASL through conversational discourse, comprehension and construction; development of language learning strategies; development of intercultural understanding; critical thinking skills, metacognition, and metalinguistic skills; and making real-life connections.

In New Zealand and in Wales, the teaching and learning of NZSL and BSL respectively also explicitly aims to contribute towards the development of the broader aims and values of the curriculum. The

curriculum guidance for NZSL, for example, describes how the values of the New Zealand Curriculum (excellence; innovation, inquiry and curiosity; diversity; equity; community and participation; ecological sustainability; integrity; respect) are reflected and developed in classrooms with NZSL programmes, while the Curriculum for Wales highlights how the teaching and learning of BSL can contribute towards learners' development of the curriculum's four purposes (which are to support learners to become ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; ethical, informed citizens; and healthy, confident individuals).

Headlines: what is the expressed aim, vision or intention for Sign Language learners, and what principles underpin the curriculum in Sign Language?

Key principles focus on improving access to Sign Language learning for both Deaf and hearing learners, and improving communication and cross-cultural understanding between Deaf and hearing communities.

Wider aims include consolidating learners' overarching language, literacy and communication skills; developing an understanding of language identity locally and globally; and, through Sign Language learning, developing an understanding and appreciation of diversity, equality, social justice and social cohesion; and cultivating the intellectual skills and broader capacities and capabilities for future life.

3. The Sign Language Curriculum

3.1 The place of Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum

Frameworks are in place to allow learners to study Sign Language in all six of the jurisdictions included in the desk research. Unless there are legal requirements for Sign Language to be offered as a language of instruction to Deaf or hard of hearing learners (e.g. in Kentucky and Ontario, as highlighted in Section 1.3), the decision to offer a Sign Language is, however, usually a matter for individual schools.

Sign Language is available in the mainstream curriculum in all phases of education in Victoria, New Zealand and Kentucky; intended to be offered to 3- to 16-year-olds under the Curriculum for Wales; offered from Primary 1, age 5+ to senior secondary education in Scotland; and is available in the high school curriculum in Ontario.

In Victoria, a new [Early Childhood Language Program](#), introduced in 2019, allows kindergartens to employ a language teacher to deliver part of their programme for 4- to 5-year-olds in another

language, including Auslan². The choice of language is guided by communities, early childhood service interests and the availability of qualified language teachers, taking into account community diversity; the languages spoken by children who are newly arrived or have refugee backgrounds; and continuity with language education at nearby primary schools.

The study of Sign Language in the curriculum at senior secondary level can also contribute towards senior secondary qualifications or high school graduation in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland, and Kentucky. Table 5 summarises provision.

Table 5: Sign Language in curriculum/qualifications frameworks

Jurisdiction	Sign Language	Curriculum framework/qualifications framework and age range
Australia: Victoria	Australian Sign Language (Auslan) included in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Language Program, age 4-5 • Victorian Curriculum F-10, age 5-16 • Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), age 16-18
Canada: Ontario	American Sign Language (ASL) ³ included in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASL as a Second Language curriculum Grades 9-12, age 14-18 • Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), age 18
New Zealand	New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) included in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Te Whariki</i>, Early Childhood Curriculum, age 0-5 • The New Zealand Curriculum, age 5-16 • National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), age 16-18

² The languages offered are Aboriginal languages (five different languages), Arabic, Auslan, Chinese, Chin Hakha, French, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Karen, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.

³ Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) and First Nations Sign Language are also available.

Scotland	British Sign Language (BSL) included in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), age 5+⁴ Qualifications/awards in BSL, age 14/15+
USA: Kentucky	American Sign Language (ASL) included in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards for Learning ASL as a second language, age 5-18 Elective subject credits for the high school diploma
Wales	British Sign Language (BSL) included in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum for Wales, age 3-16

Across the jurisdictions, although the terminology may vary, Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum is generally offered to learners as a foreign or international language. In Victoria, Auslan is a language or, more precisely, a 'Language Other Than English (LOTE)', in the languages learning area, one of eight learning areas of the curriculum. In Ontario, ASL is a 'second language'; in New Zealand, NZSL is a language in the learning languages learning area of the curriculum; and in Scotland also, BSL is part of the languages learning area (there are eight learning areas in total in both New Zealand and Scotland). In Kentucky, ASL is described as a world language and, in Wales, BSL is an 'international language' offered under the languages, literacy and communication area of learning and experience (AoLE) of the Curriculum for Wales (there are six AoLEs.)

 Victoria	Auslan: a language or Language Other Than English (LOTE) in the Languages learning area
 ONTARIO	ASL: a Second Language
 New Zealand	NZSL: a language in Learning Languages

⁴ Although CfE covers ages 3+, the learning of additional languages does not begin until the start of Primary 1, age 5.

 Scotland	BSL: a language/modern language in Languages
 Kentucky	ASL: a World Language
 Wales	BSL: an International Language

Where Auslan is offered as a language/Language Other Than English (LOTE) in the Victorian Curriculum F-10 (ages 5-16), it forms one of six categories of available languages:

- Roman Alphabet languages: French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese
- Non-Roman Alphabet languages: Arabic, Modern Greek, Hindi, Korean
- Character languages: Chinese, Japanese
- Classical languages: classical Greek, Latin
- Sign Language: Auslan
- Aboriginal languages.

It is intended that all Victorian students learn at least one language/LOTE selected from the above categories and, in 2020, Auslan was the sixth most studied (after Chinese (Mandarin), Italian, Japanese, Indonesian, and French) (Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2021, page 11), and offered in 11.7% of government primary schools and 2.7% of secondary schools. In Wales, similarly, it is expected that all learners will have the opportunity to learn at least one international language in addition to English and Welsh.

In Scotland, BSL can be part of schools' language offer to pupils under the [1+2 language policy](#). This is the approach which intends that all children have the opportunity to learn a first additional language (L2) from Primary 1 (age 5+), and a second additional language (L3) no later than Primary 5 (age 9+). The L2 language must be a language which learners can continue to study at secondary school to the level of a national qualification. In 2019, schools in 10 (of 32) local authorities in Scotland were delivering BSL as a second additional language (L3), (Scottish Government, 2021, page 29) and, by 2021, more, different languages were being offered by both primary and secondary schools, with growth in BSL and Scots in particular (Scottish Government, 2022).

In Ontario, where ASL as a second language has been offered at high school level only (14- to 18-year-olds) since September 2021⁵, it is an 'open course', designed to broaden students' knowledge and skills in subjects that reflect their interests and prepare them for participation in society. Credits achieved in ASL can also influence a student's next steps by contributing towards high school graduation (the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, OSSD), as they can also in Kentucky.

In New Zealand, where guidance on NZSL in the curriculum positions it as a language of choice alongside other languages offered in mainstream schools and early childhood settings, that is, as a language to be learned by hearing students, credits in NZSL can contribute towards the senior secondary National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and towards University Entrance (UE) requirements. In Victoria, similarly, credits in Auslan can contribute towards the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and towards the calculation of students' Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) for university admission.

3.2 Curriculum organisation and content

As summarised in Table 6, curriculum content in Sign Language is set out as strands, or strands and sub-strands, in Victoria, Ontario and New Zealand; as goals and standards in Kentucky; and as 'statements of what matters' in the Curriculum for Wales. Deaf community and Sign Language culture is a strong theme running through curriculum content, and curriculum guidance documents across the jurisdictions emphasise the interrelatedness of the various content strands.

⁵ Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) and First Nations Sign Language are also available.

Table 6: Curriculum content for Sign Languages

Victoria	Victorian Curriculum F-10 - Auslan: 2 strands	Victorian Curriculum F-10 - Auslan: 10 sub-strands
	<p>Communicating: using language for communicative purposes in interpreting, creating and exchanging meaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialising: interacting to exchange ideas, opinions, experiences, thoughts and feelings; and participating in planning, negotiating, deciding and taking action • Informing: obtaining, processing, interpreting and conveying information through a range of Auslan texts; developing and applying knowledge • Creating: engaging with imaginative experience by participating in, responding to and creating a range of texts, such as stories, poetry, art and performance • Translating: moving between languages and cultures, understanding that words and signs do not always have direct equivalence and recognising different interpretations and explaining these to others • Identity: exploring and expressing sense of identity as individuals, and as members of the Deaf community and culture and as Deaf, hard of hearing or hearing people • Reflecting: Participating in intercultural exchange, questioning reactions and assumptions; and considering how interaction shapes communication and identity

	Understanding: analysing and understanding language and culture as resources for interpreting and shaping meaning in intercultural exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems of language: understanding the language system, including visual-gestural language parameters, conventions and grammar • Language variation and change: understanding how language use varies according to individual difference and context and across time and place • Language awareness: analysing and understanding language and culture over time, including language attitudes, language policy, language rights, international contexts and language vitality • The role of language and culture: analysing and understanding the role of language and culture in the exchange of meaning
Ontario	ASL as a Second Language, Grades 9-12: 4 strands	ASL as a Second Language, Grades 9-12: 11 sub-strands
	Strand A: Conversational discourse. Knowledge and skills essential for conversations/communication in ASL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding ideas and information in ASL conversational discourse • Responding to ideas and information in ASL conversational discourse • Reflecting in ASL conversational discourse
	Strand B: Comprehending ASL construction and content. Knowledge and skills essential to understanding basic ASL content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating understanding of ASL content • Purpose, ASL form, and style • Reflecting on comprehension in ASL

	Strand C: Constructing ASL content and usage of grammatical structures. Knowledge and skills essential to creating ASL literary works and ASL texts for different purposes and audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose, audience and ASL forms • Using the ASL constructing process • Reflecting on the ASL constructing process
	Strand D: Understanding the connections between ASL language, culture, identity and community. Knowledge and skills essential to understanding ASL as a language; its connection to ASL culture, identity, history, and community; its role in significant events; and its contributions to Canadian and global societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASL language, culture, identity and community • ASL equity and social justice issues
New Zealand	NZSL in the New Zealand Curriculum: 3 strands	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language skills • Communication functions • Sociocultural contexts 	
Kentucky	Standards for learning ASL as a second language: 5 Goals	Standards for learning ASL as a second language: Goal-related standards
	Communication: Communicate in ASL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 1.1: Use ASL to engage in conversations and provide information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions • Standard 1.2: Comprehend and interpret live and recorded ASL on a variety of topics

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 1.3: Present information, concepts and ideas to an audience of viewers in ASL
	Cultures: Gain knowledge and understanding of Deaf culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 2.1: Demonstrate understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of American Deaf culture • Standard 2.2: Demonstrate understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of American Deaf culture
	Connections: Use ASL to connect with other disciplines and acquire information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 3.1: Reinforce and further knowledge of other disciplines through ASL • Standard 3.2: Acquire information and recognise the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through ASL and Deaf culture
	Comparisons: Develop insight into the nature of language and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 4.1: Demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of ASL and own languages • Standard 4.2: Demonstrate understanding of the nature of culture through comparisons of American Deaf culture and own culture
	Communities: Use ASL to participate in communities at home and around the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 5.1: Use ASL within and beyond the school setting • Standard 5.2: Show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using ASL for personal enjoyment and enrichment

- Languages connect us
- Understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us
- Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication
- Literature fires imagination and inspires creativity

There are no Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) ‘benchmarks’ or ‘experiences and outcomes’ for BSL in Scotland, setting out learning (and progression), as there are for other CfE curriculum areas. Staff in one school in Scotland consequently followed the modern languages experiences and outcomes document when introducing BSL as a language option, adapting the terminology to take account of the visual and spatial dimensions of BSL (Table 7):

Table 7: Terminology used in the CfE

CfE modern languages experiences and outcomes terminology	BSL adaptation
Listening	Watching (receptive)
Talking	Signing (productive)
Speaker	User
Talk	Presentation
Text	Source
Writing	Production
Reading	Reception

Source: Kinsman, 2014

In Wales, the four statements of what matters around which BSL curriculum content is organised are the same top-level four statements as for other international languages, adapted in their detail for the teaching and learning of BSL. In Kentucky similarly, the five goals set out for ASL reflect those for the learning of other world languages, known as the 5Cs of foreign language instruction: communication, cultures/intercultural communication, connections, comparisons, and communities. In New Zealand, the three NZSL strands of language skills, communication functions, and sociocultural contexts reflect the three strands for the learning of all other languages in the learning languages learning area (communication, language knowledge, cultural knowledge) and, in Victoria, the strands and sub-strands of the Auslan curriculum are the same as those for other LOTEs, with the additions for Auslan of the ‘identity’ sub-strand under the communication strand, and ‘language awareness’ under the understanding strand.

The Ontario Curriculum for international languages at Grades 9-12 stands apart from the curriculum for ASL as a second language, organised in the strands of A. listening, B. speaking, C. reading and D. writing. Table 8 provides a comparison.

Table 8: Terminology used in the Ontario Curriculum

Strands in the Ontario curriculum for international languages	Strands in the Ontario curriculum for international languages
A. Listening	A. Conversational discourse
B. Speaking	B. Comprehending ASL construction and content
C. Reading	C. Constructing ASL content and usage of ASL grammatical structures
D. Writing	D. Connections/understanding the connections between ASL language, culture, identity and community

3.3 The Sign Language curriculum and the development of wider skills in the curriculum

In Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, the Sign Language curriculum is also intended to contribute to the development of wider skills, which are set out in the curriculum. In Ontario, for example, the study of ASL and of all other curriculum subjects is intended to contribute towards the development of seven ‘transferable skills’. These are the attributes and skills that students need to thrive in the modern world (critical thinking and problem solving; innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship; self-directed learning; collaboration; communication; global citizenship and sustainability; digital literacy). The online ASL as a second language curriculum [webpages](#), which set out the curriculum expectations for ASL by strand, identify the transferable skills of the Ontario Curriculum towards which study of the specific strands can contribute. (The expectations are also explained in ASL via videos on these webpages.)

Schools’ BSL curriculum in Wales is expected to incorporate opportunities for consideration of cross-cutting elements such as human rights, children’s rights and diversity; local, national and international contexts; and careers and work-related experience. It is also intended to contribute towards development of the mandatory cross-curricular skills of the Curriculum for Wales – digital skills, literacy, and numeracy, and towards the integral skills of creativity and innovation, critical-thinking and problem-solving, personal effectiveness, and planning and organising, that underpin the [four purposes](#) of the Curriculum for Wales. In Victoria, similarly, it is intended that the

capabilities of the Victorian Curriculum F-10, which are a set of discrete knowledge and skills in critical and creative thinking, being ethical, being intercultural, personal and social skills, literacy, numeracy and ICT, are developed and applied across the curriculum, including in the teaching and learning of languages such as Auslan. Learning about the three cross-curriculum priorities - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability - is also embedded in the learning areas. These priorities aim to provide national, regional and global dimensions and give students the knowledge and skills to engage with and better understand their world.

The curriculum guidelines for NZSL in New Zealand also describe how the values of the curriculum (excellence; innovation, inquiry and curiosity; diversity; equity; community and participation; ecological sustainability; integrity; respect) are reflected in classrooms with NZSL programmes. Through developing an understanding of Deaf culture, programmes enable students to develop and clarify their own values and beliefs; respect the rights of those who may hold values and attitudes that are different from their own; develop positive attitudes towards learning as a lifelong process; and examine the context and implications of their own attitudes, of New Zealand's social system, and of the values on which different social structures are based.

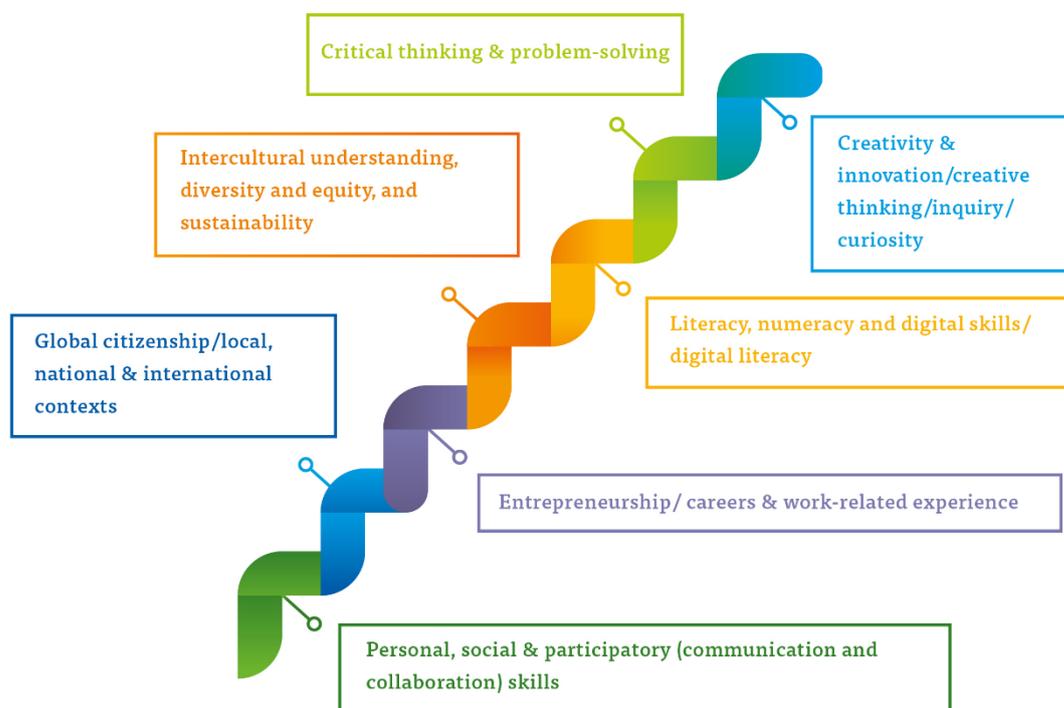
Although, as highlighted earlier, there is no specific curriculum guidance for BSL in Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, the learning of languages is intended to contribute towards the development of the four CfE capacities (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors). Languages do this by, for example, helping learners to develop their ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings and respond to those of other people; to use different media effectively for learning and communication; to exercise their intellectual curiosity by questioning and developing their understanding; to use creative and critical thinking to synthesise ideas and arguments; to enhance their enjoyment and understanding of their own and other cultures; and to develop competence so that they can understand and communicate including, for some, in work settings.

In sum:

In Australia: Victoria	The study of Auslan contributes to the development of:	the capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the Victorian Curriculum F-10
In Canada: Ontario	ASL contributes to the development of:	the seven transferable skills of the Ontario Curriculum
In New Zealand	The study of NZSL contributes to the development of:	the values of the New Zealand Curriculum
In Scotland	The study of languages helps develop:	the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence
In Wales	BSL contributes to the development of:	the cross-curricular skills, the integral skills and the cross-cutting elements of Curriculum for Wales

Figure 2 summarises the commonalities in the broader curriculum skills towards which the teaching and learning of Sign Language is intended to contribute in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales.

Figure 2: Skills development in the Sign Language curriculum



3.3 Curriculum pathways

Across the six jurisdictions, curriculum arrangements and pathways for Sign Language learning vary, depending on whether learners are Deaf/hard of hearing or hearing learners (Table 9).

In New Zealand, for example, there is one NZSL curriculum guidance document for all learners, whether they are first language Deaf or hard of hearing learners, or whether they are learning NZSL as a second or subsequent language option alongside the spoken languages offered by schools. (NZSL may also be the medium of instruction across all learning areas for Deaf students.) In Wales also, there is one BSL curriculum, intended for Deaf or hard of hearing BSL users and for students new to BSL (typically hearing students) who are learning BSL as an 'international language'.

Table 9: Curriculum pathways for Sign Language

One curriculum/one pathway All learners	Separate pathways/curricula Deaf/first language learners Hearing/second language learners	One second language pathway/ curriculum

New Zealand	Australia: Victoria	Canada: Ontario
Scotland*	USA: Kentucky	
Wales		

*Although there is no explicit Curriculum for Excellence framework/guidance document for the teaching and learning of BSL, the suite of BSL qualifications available to learners in secondary education is aimed at both hearing and Deaf learners.

In Kentucky, there are separate Kindergarten to Grade 12 content standards (curriculum guidance) for learners who are learning ASL as a second (world or modern) language, and for those learning ASL as a first or heritage language⁶. (These standards are nationally developed, and the focus in this desk research is on the standards for learning ASL as a second language.)

In Victoria, there are two learner pathways (L1, first language learner; L2, second language learner). The first language learner pathway is intended for students who are native signing and who have fluent language models to interact with at home; the second language learner pathway is for students learning Auslan as a second or additional language. This will typically be hearing students, but may include hard of hearing or Deaf students who already have an established first language, and are being introduced to Auslan for the first time as an additional language. In terms of the organisation of the curriculum (as summarised in Section 3.2), the strands and sub-strands of the Victorian F-10 Curriculum first language and second language learner pathways for Auslan are the same, although the detail of the content varies.

The [curriculum framework](#) recognises that the two pathways may not be able to meet the complete learning needs of all students. Native signers of Auslan who are hearing, such as hearing children from Deaf families/the children of Deaf adults (CODAs), for example, may not be adequately accounted for in a first language learner pathway, where the teaching and learning emphasis is on the primary target group - Deaf students. They will, though, have far more knowledge and

⁶ Heritage learners have some experience of Sign Language but it is not their first language. They may, for example, have learned Sign Language at home, but subsequently become dominant in another, usually spoken, language.

experience than a second language learner, which may mean that that pathway also does not adequately suit their needs. A Deaf migrant already fluent in a native signed language from another country, such as American Sign Language, may similarly not be entirely suited to a second language learner pathway for Auslan. Many first language learner features and linguistic competencies will already be present in his/her use of another signed language, making a second signed language easier to learn compared to other second language learners, who are being exposed to learning a signed language for the first time. It is intended that schools/teachers will make decisions about which pathway best serves individual students' needs, making appropriate adjustments to differentiate learning experiences.

In New Zealand, where there is one pathway for all learners, the curriculum guidance recognises that learners of NZSL can be of any age and have diverse experiences and needs. They may be Deaf, hearing impaired, or hearing; have a strong background in NZSL, where the language is their normal means of communicating with their family and other members of the Deaf community; have family or caregivers who use NZSL to communicate; have little or no prior experience of NZSL; or have some prior experience of NZSL, although they do not come from homes where NZSL is used. Within each of these groups of learners, there is also diversity. As in Victoria, the guidance lays the emphasis with schools/teachers, recommending that, in planning NZSL programmes, they focus on the needs of individual learners, find out what they already know and can do, and take account of their diverse requirements.

Headlines: where does Sign Language sit within the broader curriculum and policy frameworks and how does it relate to other languages in the curriculum?

In the six jurisdictions, Sign Language is generally offered alongside other (foreign or international) (spoken) languages in the mainstream curriculum. It is available in all phases of education in Victoria, New Zealand and Kentucky; intended to be offered to 3-to 16-year-olds in Wales and from Primary 1, age 5+ to age 18 in Scotland; and is offered in the high school curriculum in Ontario (ages 14-18). Studied as an option at senior secondary level in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland and Kentucky, it can contribute towards senior secondary qualifications and consequently influence a learner's post-school career.

In Victoria, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales, the organisation of curriculum content for Sign Language reflects the organisation set out for other international languages, and in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, the Sign Language curriculum is also intended to contribute to the development of the wider skills set out in the curriculum frameworks. Curriculum content is also organised by pathways. There may be one pathway/curriculum document for all learners (e.g. in New Zealand and Wales), or separate curriculum pathways for first language (usually Deaf) and second language (usually hearing) learners (e.g. Victoria and Kentucky). Whatever the framework, the onus is on teachers to differentiate curriculum content to cater for the diversity of learner experience and ability.

4. Stages of development and progression in Sign Language learning

The curriculum framework documents for Sign Language across the jurisdictions identify stages of development/principles of progression for the learning of the language. These are set out as content descriptions and achievement standards in Victoria, overall and specific expectations in Ontario, achievement objectives in New Zealand, sample progress indicators in Kentucky, and progression steps in Wales. Table 10 summarises how progression is described.

Table 10: Progression in Sign Language learning

Victorian Curriculum F-10: Auslan	Content descriptions What is to be taught	Achievement standards What students are able to understand and do	Content descriptions and achievement standards are set out by level: Foundation-Level 2, ages 5-8 Levels 3-4, ages 8-10 Levels 5-6, ages 10-12 Levels 7-8, ages 12-14 Levels 9-10, ages 14-16
Set out as:			
For:	Each strand and sub-strand of the curriculum		
Ontario: ASL as a second language	Overall expectations	Specific expectations	Overall and specific expectations are set out: for the end of the course, age 18
Set out as:			
For:	Each of the strands and sub-strands of the curriculum		
NZSL in the New Zealand Curriculum	Achievement objectives	Proficiency statements	The levels are (approximately): Level 1, ages 5-8 Level 2, ages 7-10 Level 3, ages 9-12 Level 4, ages 11-15 Level 5, ages 12-17 Level 6, ages 14-17 Level 7, ages 15-18
Set out as:	by curriculum strand for each level of the New Zealand Curriculum	for the end of Levels 2, 4, 6 and 8 of the New Zealand Curriculum	

			Level 8, ages 16-18
Scotland: BSL in Curriculum for Excellence/the 1+2 language policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No experiences and outcomes or benchmarks for BSL in the curriculum The BSL qualifications available at secondary level are set out in terms of outcomes, performance criteria and evidence requirements for the individual qualification units (see Section 5) 		
Kentucky: Standards for ASL as a second/world language Set out as:	Sample progress indicators (benchmarks for knowledge and performance)		The sample progress indicators are set out by level: Kindergarten, ages 5-6 Grade 4, ages 9-10 Grade 8, ages 13-14 Grade 12, ages 17-18 Post-secondary, age 18+
For:	each of the Standards of the five ASL Goals		
BSL in the Curriculum for Wales Set out as:	Descriptions of learning for each of the four statements of what matters for BSL	Progression steps for the descriptions of learning	The progression steps are: Progression Step 1, age 5 Progression Step 2 Progression Step 3, age 11 Progression Step 4 Progression Step 5, age 16

The extracts from the curriculum documents for Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales which follow give a more detailed snapshot of how the stages of development are set out and progression described in each jurisdiction.

Victorian Curriculum F-10 Auslan: second language learner pathway, F-10 sequence, Foundation-Level 6 Content descriptions		
Foundation-Level 2 (ages 5-8)	Levels 3-4 (ages 8-10)	Levels 5-6 (ages 10-12)
Strand: Communicating Sub-strand: Socialising		
Participate in simple interactions with peers and teachers using high-frequency signs, non-manual features and gestures to talk about self, family and class activities.	Communicate with each other and with teachers about aspects of personal worlds, daily routines, preferences and pastimes.	Share ideas and feelings about people they know, daily lives, social activities and the school community.
Participate in guided group activities, such as signing games and simple tasks using repeated language structures, facial expressions and gestures.	Participate in shared learning activities that involve planning, transacting and problem-solving, using simple signed statements, questions and directions.	Collaborate with peers to plan and conduct shared events or activities, such as performances, presentations, demonstrations or transactions.
Develop interaction and communication skills for participation in regular class routines and activities.	Respond to questions, directions and requests using non-manual features and simple questions and statements to ask for help, to indicate understanding or agreement and to negotiate turn-taking.	Communicate appropriately while involved in shared learning activities by asking and responding to questions, managing interactions, indicating understanding and monitoring learning.
Achievement standards (covering all the strands and sub-strands)		
Foundation-Level 2	Levels 3-4	Levels 5-6 ta
By the end of Level 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students interact with teachers and each other to talk about themselves, their families, friends and immediate environment. They interact in familiar 	By the end of Level 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students communicate about daily routines, interests and pastimes; recount personal experiences and classroom 	By the end of Level 6: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students discuss aspects of their daily lives, social activities and school experience and respond to each other's

classroom routines by responding to requests.

- Students ask and respond to simple questions and distinguish between statements and questions. They express likes, dislikes and feelings using lexical signs and affective non-manual features.

events; and describe people, experiences or activities using simple depicting signs.

- They use non-manual features to indicate understanding, interest or lack of interest. They use culturally appropriate protocols, such as gaining attention by waving, tapping or pointing to alert third parties.

comments. They describe relationships and characteristics of people and objects and express feelings and preferences.

- They negotiate with each other to plan, organise and complete learning tasks and activities. They follow more complex instructions and directions involving several steps.

Source: <https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/languages/auslan/introduction/scope-and-sequence>

Ontario: ASL as a second language curriculum (ages 14-18)

Strand A: ASL Conversational discourse

Sub-strand: A1. Understanding Ideas and Information in ASL Conversational Discourse

Overall expectations:	By the end of this course, students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine meaning, and demonstrate a basic knowledge of ASL culture, using comprehension strategies and interactive strategies, in a variety of basic ASL conversational discourse contexts.
Specific expectations:	By the end of this course, students will:
A1.1 Demonstrating understanding of ASL language features	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate a basic understanding of ASL language features and a basic knowledge of ASL cultural protocols in a variety of basic ASL conversational discourse contexts.
A1.2 Using comprehension strategies in ASL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use comprehension strategies and a basic knowledge of ASL cultural protocols before, during and after engaging in a variety of basic ASL conversational discourses.
A1.3 Using ASL interactive strategies to acquire ideas and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a variety of ASL interactive strategies that reflect a basic knowledge of ASL cultural protocols to determine meaning in a variety of basic ASL conversational discourse contexts.
Transferable skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical thinking and problem-solving• Communication• Global citizenship and sustainability

Source: <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum/american-sign-language-as-a-second-language/courses/asl-second-language-l1/strands#a>

For each NZSL achievement level, the curriculum guidance also includes suggested learning and assessment activities, presenting ways of using and reinforcing NZSL in realistic, communicative language learning and cultural contexts.

USA: Kentucky. Standards for ASL as a Second Language

Goal 5: Communities. Use ASL to participate in communities at home and around the World

Standard 5.1 Students use ASL within and beyond the school setting

This Standard focuses on the value of ASL as a tool for communicating with other ASL speakers throughout life in school, in the local community, in the larger American Deaf community, and as the lingua franca of the wider Deaf World. ASL is not an international signed language; however, it is often a language used by Deaf individuals around the world in addition to their native Sign Language. The strong possibility of encountering ASL users at home and abroad allows students to apply what they have learned in ASL courses and recognize the advantages of being able to communicate in more than one language. Thus, they develop an understanding of the power of language. As students have opportunities to use ASL in response to real-world needs, they seek out situations beyond the school in which they can apply their language and culture skills. Advanced learners of ASL are able to use ASL as a lifelong tool for communication throughout their personal and professional lives.

**Sample Progress Indicators
Kindergarten, age 5-6**

- Children learn ASL vocabulary for community locations and personnel. Examples: Taking a field trip to a fire station; learning about emergency services personnel, such as police, firefighters, and doctors.

**Sample Progress Indicators
Grade 4, age 9-10**

- Children participate in conversations with native ASL users about everyday matters and daily experiences. Examples: Expressing birthday wishes via a videophone; creating a video email to confirm attendance at a party.

**Sample Progress Indicators
Grade 8, age 13-14**

- Students use ASL to communicate with peers and other members of the Deaf community about daily life, various experiences and special events. Examples: Exchanging video letters about school and life with Deaf peers; giving a presentation on a recent vacation; explaining a traditional family celebration.

**Sample Progress Indicators
Grade 12, age 17-18**

- Students use ASL to communicate with members of the Deaf community about personal interests or community and world events. Examples: Creating an ASL vlog post about community news; visiting ASL internet-based chat rooms to discuss topics important to Deaf peers.

Sample Progress Indicators
Post-secondary, age 18+

- Students communicate with members of Deaf communities regarding personal, vocational and professional interests or community and world concerns. Example: Collaborating with Deaf professionals on local issues.

Source: https://asлта.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/National_ASЛ_Standards.pdf

The sample progress indicators are based on a spiral approach, with topics and skills visited and revised with increasing complexity as students learning ASL develop greater proficiency, moving from understanding concepts at a simplified degree of difficulty to deeper and broader levels of understanding. As in New Zealand, the progress indicators are supported by examples of how students might demonstrate achievement of the progress indicators.

Wales: BSL in the Curriculum for Wales

Statement of what matters: Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication, BSL

Progression Step 1 (age 5)	Progression Step 2	Progression Step 3 (age 11)	Progression Step 4	Progression Step 5 (age 16)
I am beginning to form signs correctly.	I can articulate BSL signs and individual fingerspelled letters correctly. I can accurately articulate numerals.			
I can describe objects and events, building and extending my vocabulary. I am beginning to use the non-manual features of individual signs consistently. I am beginning to use signs to indicate time.	I can use increasingly varied and imaginative vocabulary. I can vary meaning by including non-manual features. I can use signs that have directly associated lip patterns or mouthings.	I can adapt and manipulate language and make appropriate choices about vocabulary in order to express myself with fluency and clarity. I can use BSL variants from other regions, as appropriate for the audience.	I can make informed choices about vocabulary in order to express myself with fluency, clarity and accuracy.	I can make informed choices and use vocabulary to enhance my communication skills.
I am beginning to use fingerspelled signs, for example for familiar names.	I can fingerspell accurately at my own pace	I can fingerspell accurately and at a natural pace.	I can use appropriate fingerspelling patterns and fingerspelled signs.	

Source: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/languages-literacy-and-communication/descriptions-of-learning/>

There are four statements of what matters for the languages, literacy and communication area of learning and experience in the Curriculum for Wales (languages connect us; understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us; expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication; literature fires imagination and inspires creativity). For the 'Languages connect us' statement of what matters, the descriptions of learning and progression steps are common to all languages, including BSL. For the remaining three statements of what matters, there are specific descriptions of learning and progression steps for BSL.

Although the 'Languages connect us' statement of what matters in Wales is common to all learners and languages, it is described as being particularly relevant to those learning BSL as it features:

- Identities, which can include identity as a Deaf person and BSL user in Wales and in the wider world.
- Belonging, which can include belonging to the Deaf community (local and wider) as well as to other communities.
- Culture, which can include Deaf culture as well as other cultures.
- Mediation - communicating meaning from one person to another, which can include within BSL or from one language to another.
- Etymology and language evolution, which can include the origin of individual signs, changes over time, and the history and status of BSL.
- Language variation, which can include regional lexical variation in BSL. Welsh regional signs are of social and political as well as linguistic importance to the Welsh Deaf community. People who use both BSL and Welsh may use different signs and lip patterns.

In New Zealand, the curriculum guidelines ([New Zealand Sign Language in the New Zealand Curriculum](#)), which provide the basis for NZSL programmes in early childhood settings and in primary and secondary schools for students from age 3+ to age 16+, were developed prior to the introduction of the learning languages learning area of The New Zealand Curriculum. The NZSL curriculum guidelines are now used in conjunction with the achievement objectives and proficiency descriptions of '[Learning Languages](#)' in The New Zealand Curriculum. The curriculum guidelines are also now used in conjunction with [Strand 4](#) - communication - of the early childhood curriculum (*Te Whariki*). The NZSL curriculum guidelines also include selected goals within each of the five *Te Whariki* strands (well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, exploration) and identify learning outcomes that relate to these goals and that contribute to the development of young learners' understanding of and ability to use NZSL. The guidelines also provide examples of experiences through which this learning may occur. The example extract below (Figure 3) relates to NZSL in the *Te Whariki* well-being strand.

Goals	Learning outcomes	Examples of learning experiences
Goal 2: Children experience an environment where their emotional well-being is nurtured.	Children develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an increasing ability to determine their own actions and make their own choices • a capacity to pay attention, maintain concentration, and be involved • an ability to identify their own emotional responses and those of others • confidence and ability to express emotional needs. 	Children have opportunities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make choices and express their wants and decisions using NZSL • participate in formal situations that involve Deaf adults and/or interpreters using NZSL • watch adults expressing their own emotions and identifying children's emotions using NZSL • watch and respond to others in appropriate ways.

Source: [New Zealand Sign Language in the New Zealand Curriculum](#)(page 33)

4.1 Continuum of development

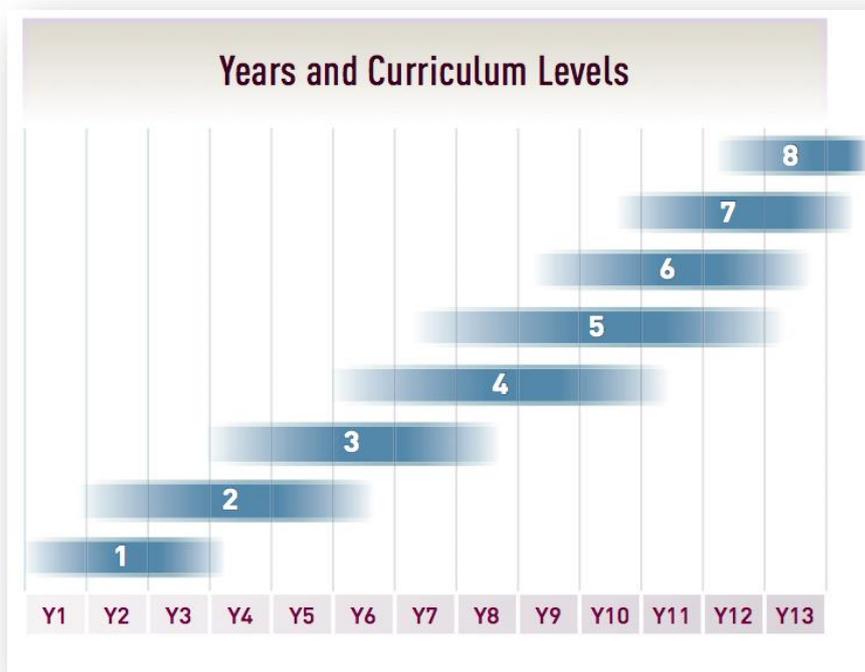
As highlighted in Table 10 and the sample extracts above, progression in Sign Language learning in Victoria, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales⁷ is expressed along a continuum, and stages of development are broadly age-related. However, as with all languages, progress depends on when learners begin to learn the language.

⁷ In Ontario, expectations are set out for the end of the Grade 9-12 course (age 18) and in Scotland, there are no CfE benchmarks for BSL.

In Kentucky, the sample progress indicators for ASL aim to allow for a broad range of student achievement, to take account of the fact that the age and grade at which an individual student enters an ASL programme, and his/her background and sets of experiences, will have significant impact on the overall level of competency and proficiency he/she will likely achieve. Students entering the study of ASL at the secondary level, for example, will need progress indicators more appropriate to novice learners, while some younger heritage learners may satisfy indicators more typical of work at the secondary/post-secondary level.

In New Zealand, the curriculum guidance recognises that there will be a range of entry points to NZSL for learners, and that they are consequently unlikely to follow the suggested progression by school year/level unless they begin to study NZSL in Year 1. Level 1 is the entry level for those with no prior knowledge of the language, regardless of the school year in which they begin to learn NZSL. Figure 4 summarises the levels of the New Zealand Curriculum (which apply across all curriculum subjects/learning areas).

Figure 4: The New Zealand Curriculum levels



Source: New Zealand Ministry of Education (2022): <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum#collapsible14>

In Wales, where the BSL curriculum is intended for Deaf BSL users and for others learning BSL as a second, third or subsequent language, descriptions of learning for each of the statements of what matters for BSL describe the learning journey for two- to three-year periods along a continuum from Progression Step 1 to Progression Step 5. The descriptions of learning are not intended to be used as learning outcomes or assessment criteria, and the progression steps relate broadly to age: Progression Step 1 usually relates to around age 5, Progression Step 3 to age 11 and the end of primary education, and Progression Step 5 to age 16 and the end of secondary education. Learners new to BSL begin at Progression Step 1, however, regardless of their age.

For Deaf children starting BSL learning at age 3 under the Curriculum for Wales, the descriptions of learning for Progression Step 1 will be the starting point. The aspiration is that these learners will progress to Progression Step 5 by age 16, and the level of challenge at Progression Step 5 matches the level of challenge for Welsh and English in the languages, literacy and communication area of learning and experience. Children who have experienced and acquired BSL from birth may progress along the continuum at a faster pace than a learner who has had little or no experience of BSL before starting formal education. Other, older learners beginning to learn BSL as an international language also start at Progression Step 1 and continue towards Progression Step 5. The pace at which they progress along the continuum and how far they progress along it will vary, depending on how long they continue learning BSL, how much contact they have with the language, and their individual ability and context. In catering for the diversity of starting points and experience of BSL learners, schools are expected to ensure that progression for more proficient BSL users is not hindered.

To take account of the different entry points to learning Auslan in Victoria, in addition to the first and second language learner pathways, two learner sequences are set out in the content descriptions and achievement standards: one for learners who begin learning Auslan in the Foundation year (age 5+), another for those who begin learning Auslan in secondary education, Year 7 (age 12+). There are consequently four possible pathways and sets of content descriptions and achievement standards: a first language pathway and a second language pathway for the F–10 sequence (first or second language Auslan students who begin to learn the language in primary school and continue to Year 10); and a first language pathway and a second language pathway for the 7–10 sequence (first language or second language students who begin to learn the language in Year 7 (secondary level, age 12+). The first language learner 7-10 sequence typically caters for Deaf students who arrive in secondary level high school education with a very limited knowledge of English, and little, if any, Auslan, and are therefore learning their first language well beyond the age of typical language development.

Headlines: are stages of development in Sign Language evident and what are the essential indicators at each stage?

The curriculum frameworks for Sign Language identify stages of development for the learning of the language, set out as content descriptions and achievement standards in Victoria, overall and specific expectations in Ontario, achievement objectives in New Zealand, sample progress indicators in Kentucky, and progression steps in Wales.

Although progression in Sign Language learning in Victoria, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales is expressed along a continuum which is broadly age-related, the curriculum frameworks are clear that progress will depend on when learners begin to learn the language, and on their previous experience, which can vary considerably. As a consequence, the age ranges linked to stages of development and progression need to be viewed more flexibly than might be the case for other subjects, such as maths, where students begin learning at the same age. In Sign Language learning, progress is less likely to be age-related and students may not achieve at the higher levels where they begin to learn the language at secondary level.

5. Assessment in Sign Language learning

5.1 Assessment and planning for progression

As with all curriculum subjects, assessment plays a fundamental role in monitoring learner progression in Sign Language learning.

In Ontario, for example, the curriculum includes content and performance standards for every subject, and assessment and evaluation are based on both of these. The content standards are the overall and specific curriculum expectations as described for the four strands of ASL in Section 4 above. The performance standards are outlined in an achievement chart, which is a standard, province-wide guide to be used by all teachers as a framework for assessing and evaluating student achievement of the expectations in a particular subject or discipline. It aims to enable teachers to make consistent judgements about the quality of student learning, based on clear performance standards and on a body of evidence collected over time. It also provides teachers with a foundation for developing clear and specific feedback for students and parents.

The [achievement chart](#) for ASL as a second language identifies four categories of knowledge and skills and four levels of achievement. The categories of knowledge and skills are 1) knowledge and understanding, 2) thinking, 3) communication, and 4) application. These are the same categories of knowledge and skills as apply for other international languages (and for all subjects in the Ontario Curriculum).

Level 3 of the four levels of achievement (Figure 5) represents the expected level of achievement, which is defined as the level of performance at which parents of students achieving at this level can be confident that their children will be prepared for work in subsequent grades/year groups or courses.

Figure 5: The four levels of achievement in Ontario

Level 1 50-59%	Achievement that falls much below the provincial standard. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with limited effectiveness. Students must work at significantly improving in specific areas if they are to be successful in the next grade.
Level 2 60-69%	Achievement approaches the expected standard. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with some effectiveness. Students performing at this level need to work on identified learning gaps to ensure future success.
Level 3 70-79%	Achievement represents the provincial standard for achievement. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with considerable effectiveness.

	Parents of students achieving at this level can be confident that their children will be prepared for work in subsequent grades or courses.
Level 4 80-100%	Achievement surpasses the provincial standard. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with a high degree of effectiveness. Achievement at this level does not, however, identify that the student has achieved expectations beyond those specified for the grade or course.

Specific qualifiers are used with the descriptors in the achievement chart to describe student performance at each of the four levels of achievement – the qualifier ‘limited’ is used for level 1; ‘some’ for level 2; ‘considerable’ for level 3; and a ‘high degree of’ or ‘thorough’ for level 4. The extract from the ‘communication’ category of knowledge and skills of the ASL as a second language achievement chart in Ontario (Table 11) provides an example of the qualifiers in use.

Similar qualifiers are used in New Zealand to demonstrate achievement in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), the senior secondary qualification. For example:

Achievement	Achievement with merit	Achievement with excellence
‘demonstrate understanding’	‘demonstrate clear understanding’	‘demonstrate thorough understanding’
‘give a presentation’	‘give an effective presentation’	‘give a convincing presentation’

Table 11: Extract from the achievement chart for ASL as a second language, Ontario

Communication: the conveying of meaning through various forms				
Categories	Level 1: 50-59% The student:	Level 2: 60-69% The student:	Level 3: 70-79% The student:	Level 4: 80-100% The student:
Expression and organisation of ideas and information (e.g. clear expression; logical organisation) in a variety of discourse forms	expresses and organises ideas and information with limited effectiveness	expresses and organises ideas and information with some effectiveness	expresses and organises ideas and information with considerable effectiveness	expresses and organises ideas and information with a high degree of effectiveness
Communication for different audiences (e.g. convey ideas and information to peers, teachers, ASL community members, non-ASL community members) and purposes (e.g. to interact, collaborate; to inform, instruct; to entertain, perform; to persuade; to discuss feelings and ideas; to solve problems) in a variety of discourse forms	communicates for different audiences and purposes with limited effectiveness	communicates for different audiences and purposes with some effectiveness	communicates for different audiences and purposes with considerable effectiveness	communicates for different audiences and purposes with a high degree of effectiveness

Use of conventions (e.g. ASL parameters ⁸ , ASL language structures, non-manual markers ⁹ , style and usage, registers), vocabulary, terminology and classifiers ¹⁰ of the discipline in a variety of discourse forms (e.g. forms appropriate to contextualised situations)	uses conventions, vocabulary, terminology and classifiers of the discipline with limited effectiveness	uses conventions, vocabulary, terminology and classifiers of the discipline with some effectiveness	uses conventions, vocabulary, terminology and classifiers of the discipline with considerable effectiveness	uses conventions, vocabulary, terminology and classifiers of the discipline with a high degree of effectiveness
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Source: <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum/american-sign-language-as-a-second-language/context/assessment-and-evaluation-of-student-achievement>

⁸ The five ASL parameters are the parameters that must be used accurately for a sign to be correct. They are handshape, palm orientation, location, movement, and non-manual signals.

⁹ Non-manual markers or signals are the various facial expressions, head tilting, shoulder raising, mouthing, and similar signals that are added to signs to create or influence meaning.

¹⁰ Sign Language features that clarify the message, e.g. by describing the size and shape of an object, representing the object itself, demonstrating how the object moves, or conveying how an object relates to other objects or people.

In New Zealand, the NZSL curriculum guidance document defines assessment as the process of obtaining meaningful information about the outcomes of teaching and learning and conveying this information to individuals and groups, and evaluation as making judgments about the results of a programme or a learner's achievements. It advises that assessment procedures should provide information that can be used to improve the ways in which the NZSL programme meets learning needs; schools should ensure that assessment and evaluation procedures are ongoing; and teachers should use a range of assessment procedures that are relevant to learners' individual needs. Schools should also include formal and informal methods of assessment in different contexts, incorporating self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment as relevant.

Recognising that individual learners may be working at different levels of the New Zealand Curriculum (see Figure 4) or that an individual might be working at one level in one aspect (learning strand) of the NZSL programme and at a different level in another, the guidance advises teachers to design programmes to accommodate these differences. It recommends also that they set clear, achievable goals, with individual learners, for learning NZSL, and build learners' self-confidence by focusing on their successes as they produce NZSL, while challenging them to improve the quality of their performance and providing them with constructive feedback.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) provides [online](#) 'planning resources', 'teaching resources', and 'assessment resources' to support teachers in implementing the Auslan curriculum. The planning resources, which are intended to support whole-school curriculum planning and the progression of learning, assessment and reporting in the classroom, include '[scope and sequence charts](#)'. These detail the content descriptions and achievement standards for the first and second language learner pathways and learner sequences (Foundation to Year 10, or Years 7-10) of the Victorian Curriculum F-10 for Auslan, described in Section 4 above. They aim to support teachers by enabling them to see progression across the learner pathways and sequences, and consequently assist in planning teaching and learning programmes to meet the diverse needs of students.

In the early years, the Victoria State Government Education and Training department is launching an Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool in 2023. The [online observation-based tool](#) aims to support assessment of children's strengths, interests and abilities aligned to the five learning and development outcomes in the [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework \(VEYLDF\)](#) (children have a strong sense of identity; children are connected with and contribute to their world; children have a strong sense of well-being; children are confident and involved learners; children are effective communicators). Some of the eight modules included in the new tool may be pertinent to Auslan. The modules are: 1) identity and community – social; 2) well-being – emotion; 3) learning dispositions; 4) communication – interactions; 5) communication - symbols and text; 6)

learning and communication – numeracy; 7) well-being – movement; and 8) learning and identity - thinking skills.

5.2 Sign Language qualifications

Assessment in the learning of Sign Language in mainstream education in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand and Kentucky can contribute towards senior secondary leaving qualifications/high school graduation, and consequently towards progression to further study/tertiary education. In Scotland, BSL qualifications/awards are available for students from around age 14. Table 12 summarises provision.

Table 12: Sign language qualifications in mainstream provision

	Qualification / award:	Successful completion requires:	Sign Language can contribute:	Assessment is:
Australia: Victoria	Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 course units • Students usually take 20-24 course units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 course units • 50 hours of classroom instruction per unit 	Internal and external
Canada: Ontario	Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 compulsory credits • 12 optional credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compulsory or optional credits • 1 credit is awarded for a 110-hour course 	Internal
New Zealand	National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA): Level 1, Level 2, Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80 credits at each level • A typical course generates 18-24 credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: 19 credits • Level 2: 19 credits • Level 3: 20 credits • 1 credit is around 10 hours' teaching and assessment 	Internal
Kentucky	High school graduation diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 credits • 6 of which come from elective subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • towards the elective subject credits • 1 credit is 120 hours of instructional time 	Internal
Scotland	BSL qualifications, available as standalone units or full qualifications (awards), for learners from Secondary 3-6 (ages 14/15-18) (and older learners) Available at Levels 3-6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF); internally assessed			

Wales	No current mainstream BSL qualifications
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In all jurisdictions, internal assessment is moderated.

Of the 16 units required to achieve the senior secondary Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), four can come from the study of Auslan. Students in Victoria select the units based on the subjects that interest them and usually take between 20 and 24 units (five or six subjects or 'studies') in Years 11 and 12 (ages 16-18). The four units of the VCE Auslan course each involve at least 50 hours of scheduled classroom instruction, with Units 1 and 2 usually taken in the first year of the course, Year 11, ages 16-17, and Units 3 and 4 in Year 12. There are no prerequisites for Units 1, 2 and 3 of the Auslan course, but students taking Unit 4 must previously have taken Unit 3.

Students demonstrate achievement of the outcomes for each unit, which are based on the progressive development of skills in receptive and productive use of signed language, through activities and tasks organised around three themes – the individual; the Deaf and hearing communities; and the changing world. For Units 1 and 2, individual schools make decisions on student achievement of the levels of achievement, which they can choose to report using grades, descriptive statements or other indicators. For Units 3 and 4, assessment is via a combination of internal and external assessment - school-assessed coursework and examinations.

For the school-based assessment component, schools use designated assessment tasks, which are set out in the [study design](#) document for Auslan, selecting a total of four for each unit. Assessment tasks should be selected to ensure that both receptive and expressive skills are assessed, e.g. a task such as an interview with a Deaf person may be used to simultaneously assess receptive as well as expressive skills, and all tasks are digitally recorded. It is intended that the tasks form part of the regular teaching and learning programme; are completed in class, under supervision; and do not unduly add to the workload associated with the programme. The VCE Auslan assessment handbook¹¹ provides additional guidance for teachers. The end-of-year [examinations](#) are an

¹¹ downloadable on the VCE Auslan [webpage](#)

interactive sign examination, and a sign comprehension and sign production examination. In 2020, 35 students graduating from secondary school had completed Auslan study to Year 12 level (Unit 4) (Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2021, page 22).

In high school in Ontario, where American Sign Language (ASL) is an 'open course', designed to broaden students' knowledge and skills in subjects that reflect their interests and prepare them for their future participation in society, credits in ASL can contribute towards the 18 compulsory or 12 optional credits required for completion of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). 1 credit is awarded in recognition of the successful completion of one 110-hour course; determined by a final percentage mark of 50 per cent or higher on the course, granted by the principal/headteacher. The final percentage grade for each course is determined in relation to the learning expectations of the course, with 70 per cent of the grade based on assessments conducted throughout the course, and 30 per cent based on a final evaluation in the form of an examination, performance, essay and/or other method of evaluation suitable to course content and administered towards the end of the course.

Credits in ASL as an elective (optional) subject, selected based on the student's academic and career interests and their [Individual Learning Plan](#), can similarly contribute towards the 22-credit high school graduation diploma in Kentucky. Schools establish performance descriptors and evaluation procedures to determine if content and performance standards have been met, based on the policy for awarding credit set by the local board of education. The board awards credit based on a standards-based unit credit that consists of at least 120 hours of instructional time in one subject, or a performance-based credit based on standards.

In New Zealand, NZSL can be chosen by students as a language subject for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Available at three levels, Level 1 NCEA achievement standards broadly relate to Level 6 of The New Zealand Curriculum (age around 16); Level 2 achievement standards to Level 7 (age 17); and Level 3 NCEA achievement standards to Level 8 of The New Zealand Curriculum (age 18) (Figure 4 above). Successful achievement of the NZSL achievement standards, graded at four levels (not achieved; achieved; achieved with merit; achieved with excellence), contributes 19 credits towards the 80-credit qualification at NCEA Levels 1 and 2, and 20 of the 80 credits at NCEA Level 3. Achievement against the standards in the NZSL course, set out in four strands of learning - watch and respond; sign, present; interact; and sign for different purposes, is assessed internally, by students' teachers, and the Ministry of Education provides assessment resources at [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#) and [Level 3](#) to guide effective assessment. As guides, these assessment resources are not intended to be used as actual assessment. Teachers are expected to

modify them¹² to set authentic assessment tasks which will enable students to demonstrate that they can apply what they know and can do.

Young people in senior secondary education in Scotland (Secondary 4 -Secondary 6, ages 15-18) build up a portfolio of qualifications, which are intended to continue their development of the knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities of the Curriculum for Excellence. Qualifications in British Sign Language (BSL) can contribute to this portfolio, and the Scottish Qualifications Authority has developed a suite of awards, which are offered as standalone units or full qualifications to both hearing and Deaf learners from Secondary 3-6 (ages 14/15-18). The qualifications, which are also aimed at school leavers, college students, adult returners to education, those in volunteering roles etc., are at Levels 3 to 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), Level 6 of which equates to the level of Scottish Highers, the most common entry qualifications for higher education in Scotland.

Each unit of the qualifications (there are two units at Level 3; three at Levels 4-6) is assessed separately, under centre supervision, and assessment against the outcomes, performance criteria and evidence requirements set out for each unit can take place at appropriate points as candidates progress through the tasks within the units, and once they have developed the knowledge and skills required. Each individual unit specification includes guidance on approaches to delivery and internal assessment, covering sequencing/integration of units, recognition of prior learning, support materials and resource requirements, and in both unit delivery and assessment, teachers are encouraged to focus on contexts and topics that most closely reflect those their learners are likely to use in their day-to-day lives. For example, some learners may be learning BSL for work purposes, while others may want to improve their ability to communicate with friends or family members in social settings. Evidence of assessment can be presented in a format which best suits individual candidates and the activities being undertaken, and can be generated using different types of

¹² (e.g. by setting different contexts or topics to be investigated, by identifying different texts for students to read or perform etc.)

assessment. It may, for example, include filmed/recorded footage of live production of BSL, written records, assessor records, photographs, blogs/vlogs, role-play or drama, or presentations.

Although there are no mainstream BSL qualifications in Wales, Qualifications Wales is developing a new BSL qualification aimed specifically at school-aged learners (aged around 16). There is also a range of BSL assessment tools for Deaf BSL users, including a BSL receptive skills test ([BSL-RST](#)), intended for Deaf children aged 3-12; a BSL production skills test ([BSL-PT](#)) for Deaf children aged 4-11; and a BSL vocabulary test ([VT](#)), a computer-adapted assessment of BSL vocabulary knowledge intended for Deaf children aged 4-15 who are acquiring BSL.

Focus of learning in Sign Language qualifications

The content on which assessment for high school graduation is based in Ontario and Kentucky is that of the mainstream curriculum documents, that is, the strands and sub-strands of the ASL as a Second Language curriculum in Ontario, and the goals and standards of the Standards for Learning ASL as a second language in Kentucky.

Table 13 summarises the content around which assessment for the senior secondary qualifications in Victoria, New Zealand and Scotland is organised.

The units of assessment for the BSL awards in Scotland aim to help learners to develop their language skills; communicate with BSL users in various contexts; develop their understanding of how Sign Languages work, and how they differ from spoken and written languages; and develop language competences in receptive skills, productive skills, conversation skills and knowledge of Sign linguistics. For learners who already use BSL, the awards aim to help them to develop their ability to communicate clearly, think critically, and use their own language creatively.

Table 13: Themes/topics of assessment for Sign Language qualifications (Victoria, New Zealand, Scotland)

<p>Australia: Victoria</p>	<p>Themes/topics for demonstration of the VCE outcomes and key knowledge and skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the individual: aims to enable students to explore aspects of their personal world (e.g. sense of self, aspirations for the future, personal values, opinions, ideas, and relationships with others), and to study topics from the perspective of other individuals • the Deaf and hearing communities: explores topics from the perspective of groups within those communities or the communities as a whole and encourages students to reflect on their own culture and the cultures of others <p><i>the changing world: aims to enable students to explore change as it affects aspects of the world of work and other topics such as technology, travel and social issues</i></p>
<p>New Zealand</p>	<p>Areas/strands of learning of the NCEA achievement standards for NZSL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • watch and respond • sign, present • interact <p>sign for different purposes</p>
<p>Scotland</p>	<p>Units of assessment for BSL qualifications focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using language in context (Level 3-6 qualifications) • understanding language and linguistics (Level 3-6 qualifications) <p><i>history and the Deaf community (Level 4-6 qualifications)</i></p>

Headlines: What guidance is provided on assessing and planning for progression in Sign Language learning?

The jurisdictions provide guidance, in the form, for example, of achievement charts in Ontario, scope and sequence charts in Victoria, and assessment tasks or sample assessment resources within qualification specifications in Victoria and New Zealand, to support assessment of student learning and enable teachers to make consistent judgements about the quality of learning. In addition to school-based (internal) assessment, which usually takes place once teachers judge that their students have developed the knowledge and skills required, end-of-year/end-of-course examinations are a feature of assessment in Sign Language learning in Victoria and Ontario.

Like Sign Language curriculum content, assessment is intended to accommodate the potential diversity in students' Sign Language learning experiences and ability.

6. Pedagogy in Sign Language Learning

6.1 Pedagogy/models of practice

The curriculum documents for Sign Language in the mainstream curriculum in Victoria, Ontario, New Zealand, Kentucky and Wales, and the qualification specifications in Scotland, include some guidance on recommended pedagogy, and hints and tips for teaching and learning.

In Ontario, for example, for each of the expectations for the four strands of the ASL as a second language curriculum, the [curriculum guidance](#) document includes 'teacher supports' (pages 97-129). These include instructional tips suggesting instructional strategies and authentic contexts for the effective modelling, practice and application of language in real-world situations. They are meant to serve as illustrations or suggestions for ASL teachers, rather than as exhaustive or mandatory lists, and to be used by teachers as appropriate for their classrooms. An instructional tip for the specific curriculum expectation: A2.2 ASL Cultural Knowledge, Purpose, and Audience, for example, is to 'Invite a member of an Indigenous Sign Language community to share information and answer questions (e.g. about the significance of using a circle in group conversations)'.

In Kentucky, the [Standards for Learning American Sign Language](#) as a second language include examples of how students might demonstrate achievement of the sample progress indicators, and a range of 'learning scenarios' (pages 51-61), which are linked to targeted standards. A learning scenario for outer space for Kindergarten to Grade 4, for example, links to standards 1.1 Interpersonal Communication, 1.2 Interpretive Communication, 2.1 Practices of Culture, 2.2 Products of Culture, 3.1 Making Connections, 4.1 Language Comparisons, 4.2 Cultural Comparisons, and 5.1 School and Community of the ASL standards.

Figure 16 highlights key aspects of Sign Language pedagogy in the Sign Language curriculum framework documents across the jurisdictions.

Table 14: Recommended pedagogies for Sign Language learning

Pedagogies	Selected jurisdiction examples
<p>Incorporate authentic learning opportunities and real-life connections through liaison with the Deaf community/first language Sign Language users</p>	<p>Victoria: excursions to Deaf community events and the development of ongoing relationships with community members (such as Deaf seniors) will support learning and build and perpetuate mutual understanding and connections for the benefit of students and the community.</p> <p>Victoria: where learners on first and second language learner pathways (Deaf and hard of hearing students and their hearing peers) engage with each other, either face- to-face or via technology, this allows second language learner students to practise the language in a real-world context, and Deaf students to broaden their peer network.</p> <p>Ontario: schools should encourage students to experience ASL within the local ASL community to enhance their understanding of ASL and gain experiences that will enhance the development of metacognitive and metalinguistic knowledge and skills.</p> <p>New Zealand: the Deaf community can provide resource people who add meaning and depth to NZSL programmes, and students should have opportunities to participate in community situations where NZSL is used. Learning activities should enable them to communicate in NZSL in real and natural contexts and in appropriate and meaningful ways, and provide them with opportunities for sustained conversations with other users of NZSL in a variety of situations as language role models.</p> <p>Scotland: learning programmes should enable students to visit Deaf organisations, Deaf clubs or BSL events and to engage in discussions; schools should invite representatives of Deaf organisations or members of the Deaf community to visit to discuss topics with learners; and students should participate in online video calls or conferences with other BSL users.</p> <p>Kentucky: schools should ensure that students are exposed to the cultural values, beliefs and practices of those who use ASL in their daily lives by attending events where Deaf people get together, share information and collective wisdom and nurture their sense of community, or by ensuring that second language ASL learners can participate in the culture of the Deaf community through virtual interactions such as Deaf community vlogs.</p> <p>Wales: in designing a BSL curriculum, it is important for effective teaching and learning to engage with role models, local BSL communities, and events and activities involving Deaf people; to work with the Deaf community and outside organisations; and to provide opportunities for students to</p>

	<p>experience events for Deaf people such as sports, cultural events and arts events.</p>
<p>Incorporate authentic learning opportunities that make learning relevant</p>	<p>In addition to taking account in Sign Language teaching and learning programmes of students' prior experience and learning and Sign Language heritage, the curriculum guidance includes recommendations, such as:</p> <p>Ontario: ensure ASL learning activities include a balance of skills and strategies that are taught in contexts that reflect students' interests, background knowledge and experience, and that offer varied opportunities for students to interact in ASL in meaningful ways that simulate real-life situations, e.g. through authentic communicative tasks, such as requesting information or conveying messages.</p> <p>New Zealand: use interactive, communicative and experiential teaching and learning approaches that recognise, acknowledge and value diverse learning; make use of the experience and skills of learners; and ensure they have meaningful and purposeful interactions in NZSL that have some personal importance for them.</p> <p>Scotland: ensure teaching and learning is learner-centred, participative and practical, giving learners the opportunity to develop their knowledge of BSL through learning activities and topics that are appropriate, relevant, engaging, meaningful and motivating to individual learners; that relate to the contexts of society, learning, employability and culture; and that reflect the purposes for which learners are likely to use the language in their day-to-day lives, e.g. for work purposes, for communicating with friends or family members, etc.</p>
<p>Vary instructional strategies</p>	<p>Ontario: include a variety of instructional strategies, such as structured simulations, guided inquiry, cooperative learning, and open-ended questions, and provide frequent opportunities for students to collaborate and practise in pairs, small groups, and large groups.</p> <p>New Zealand: offer learners a variety of activities which will enhance their learning environment and increase their interest, motivation, enjoyment and achievement; provide opportunities for them to participate in a wide range of learning activities appropriate to the developmental stage; and organise classrooms to be flexible and to allow learners to work as a whole class, in groups or pairs, and individually, and to move around.</p> <p>Scotland: enable students to develop skills by, for example, working in pairs or small groups; role-playing different scenarios in the classroom; doing an interview in BSL to collect different viewpoints from other learners or BSL users; playing games or doing paired activities in BSL.</p>

Make appropriate use of ICT

Victoria: the three-dimensional visual-spatial nature of Auslan means that it is ideally taught in a face-to-face context. Where that is not possible, such as for rural and remote learners, ICT plays an important role in providing access to a variety of signers and signed texts. ICT can also facilitate opportunities for classroom interaction to reflect the use of Auslan in the Deaf community, by enabling students to interact with other students and signers of Auslan, including native signers of Auslan who provide linguistic and cultural role models.

Ontario: schools should use technology to support ASL language and literacy development.

New Zealand: teachers should make appropriate use of ICT in the classroom, e.g. to access a wider range of learning opportunities, and to record learners' NZSL output visually for later playback and review.

Scotland: teachers should enable students to participate in online video calls or conferences with other BSL users.

Kentucky: schools considering offering ASL classes should consider the need for equipment with robust ability to display video-based media, and for access to video conferencing technology adapted for signed language. This will provide students with access to synchronous and asynchronous communication with Deaf people and other ASL language learners at a distance from the site of the programme.

Maximise Sign Language use in Sign Language classrooms, and in the wider school environment

Victoria: for second language learners, use Auslan for classroom routines and language learning tasks and, if possible, as the language of instruction for learning the content of other learning areas.

Victoria: maximise opportunities for the use of Auslan in the classroom, school, local and wider community, with English being used only in a supplementary capacity.

Ontario: where possible, in ASL classrooms, use ASL as the language of instruction in all classroom interactions so that students have constant exposure to correct models of language usage in a variety of situations, and frequent opportunities to use ASL and interact effectively with others, including those whose first language is ASL.

New Zealand: make NZSL the main language used in the NZSL classroom.

Wales: both Deaf and hearing learners benefit from a language-rich environment where the status of BSL as one of Wales' indigenous languages

	<p>is recognised, and where BSL can be used across the whole school environment and throughout the school day, as appropriate for learners.</p>
<p>Ensure frequency of opportunity to use Sign Language</p>	<p>Victoria: structure classroom interaction to ensure that there are numerous opportunities, including those provided by communications technology, for students to interact with other students, the teacher and other signers of Auslan.</p> <p>Ontario: high-quality ASL courses provide daily opportunities for students to engage in various language activities in connection with the expectations of all four strands of the ASL curriculum. Students have opportunities to use and re-use the range of specific ASL structures they are taught in a variety of contexts, and have frequent opportunities to practise and refine their skills and apply new learning.</p> <p>New Zealand: learners participate in a wide range of NZSL learning activities, with frequent opportunities to practise repetition, which plays an important role in language learning.</p> <p>Kentucky: schools should consider frequent ASL classes of shorter duration, for example, ASL classes meeting daily or every other day for 50 minutes to an hour will be more effective than one class of 3–5 hours’ duration per week.</p>
<p>Access high-quality, authentic resources</p>	<p>Victoria: learners need opportunities to engage with a range of age-appropriate signed texts, both live and recorded, designed for learning Auslan in school. Authentic texts created for Deaf people, such as websites, provide opportunities to extend understanding of language and culture. Texts should come from a range of domains or genres, such as community announcements, vlogs, and stories, and serve a variety of purposes, such as informative, transactional, communicative, imaginative and expressive.</p> <p>Ontario: use ASL works created by ASL people to develop students’ deeper appreciation of how ASL language and ASL culture are interwoven with a person’s identity; enable students to access online communities, ASL newsletters, and online ASL video works created by ASL community members</p>

	<p>to explore, for example, the relationships between ASL vocabulary and classifiers¹³.</p> <p>New Zealand: teachers and learners use authentic NZSL materials and contexts wherever possible, and learners are offered a variety of activities which will enhance their learning environment and increase their interest, motivation, enjoyment and achievement.</p>
<p>Reflect Deaf/Sign Language context and culture in teaching and learning</p>	<p>Victoria: ensure experiences provided enable students to extend their knowledge both of Auslan and Deaf culture.</p> <p>Ontario: high-quality ASL courses highlight the interconnectedness of language and culture and teach language structures and conventions along with cultural concepts so that students are exposed to the key elements of language through contextualised approaches. ASL culture is integrated in daily instruction and students are exposed to social and geographical varieties of ASL, through a range of authentic materials and examples of the language being used by individuals of different ages and geographical origins and from various socio-cultural groups. This helps develop an understanding and appreciation of the diversity within communities where ASL is used, and of regional ASL vocabulary variations and differing styles and ASL vocabulary specific to particular communities.</p> <p>Ontario: ASL programmes value and acknowledge the importance of students' cultural knowledge and literacy skills in other languages, and encourage students to share information about their own languages and cultures with each other in the classroom.</p>

¹³ Classifiers are Sign Language features that clarify the message, e.g. by describing the size and shape of an object, representing the object itself, demonstrating how the object moves, or conveying how an object relates to other objects or people.

In addition to highlighting the importance of engaging with the Deaf/Sign Language community during the process of teaching and learning in Sign Language, the jurisdictions also emphasise the importance of collaboration in planning and developing programmes of Sign Language learning:

Deaf people are the custodians of their language and, as such, consultation with native or native-like and proficient users who have ownership of the language is strongly recommended to ensure Auslan is taught in a contextually and culturally correct manner ([Victoria](#)).

Schools are expected to consult with their local Deaf community in planning their programme and to ensure that, where possible, learners have access to Deaf role models with NZSL as their first language. This consultation provides a means of checking that the language being taught is appropriate and relevant to the requirements of the local Deaf community ([New Zealand](#)).

Schools' programmes of learning and teaching in BSL should be informed by sound evidence and expertise, including disciplinary expertise from the Deaf community, BSL tutors and teachers of the Deaf; and curriculum design should be through co-construction. This involves working with learners; the Deaf community; teachers of the Deaf; other practitioners; parents, carers and stakeholders; other organisations, services, agencies and networks; and other schools, settings and further and higher education institutions to share learning and understanding of what underpins successful approaches and practices ([Wales](#)).

In Kentucky, the (national) Standards for Learning American Sign Language as a second language note that learning to express and receive language in a physical modality, as in ASL, rather than using aural or oral channels, can create challenges for learners. Fluent ASL requires the use of the hands, eyes, face, and body and students who are shy, not fond of calling attention to themselves, or who are strong auditory learners, for example, may face particular challenges. The fundamental components of learning how to communicate spatially, rather than relying on arranging words sequentially into sentences, and of learning ASL language features like the use of space, eye gaze¹⁴,

¹⁴ The direction in which a signer is looking, which can have conventional associated meanings, such as marking a shift when a signer is changing character.

classifiers¹⁵, depicting verbs¹⁶, etc. to highlight specific language details will also likely be foreign to most students, as will conveying ASL grammar through specific markers made with the eyebrows and by tilting the head, for example. The simultaneous use of the hands, face and body to express ideas and complex units of meaning in ASL requires significant adaptation from the linear nature of spoken language.

6.2 Teaching staff and professional development

The jurisdictions recommend that Sign Language learning in mainstream education (for Deaf or hearing students) is supported by appropriately qualified staff.

The new Early Childhood Language Program in Victoria, for example, recommends that qualified Auslan teachers work with existing kindergarten teachers to deliver and embed the Auslan programme in everyday learning and routines, and to support learning through play, art, music and stories in Auslan. The Victorian Curriculum F-10 [online guidance](#) on the teaching and learning of Auslan also highlights the availability of suitably qualified personnel, including native or native-like proficient users of Auslan; the availability of qualified Auslan instructors/language teachers; and the capacity to team teach in Deaf/hearing teams, as required, as key to ensuring effective provision. It highlights the proportion of Deaf teachers, mentors, language models and Deaf community members in the region, access to them, and the need for investment in the professional development of suitable Auslan teachers as key to meeting current, future and anticipated interest and demand in Auslan programmes, and recognises that the success of the programme in schools depends on the fundamental premise that suitably skilled and qualified teachers have key roles in development and implementation.

In Scotland, it is expected that the BSL qualifications available are taught by a qualified teacher who has a qualification in BSL which is at least the level above the qualification they are teaching, or by

¹⁵ Sign Language features that clarify the message, e.g. by describing the size and shape of an object, representing the object itself, demonstrating how the object moves, or conveying how an object relates to other objects or people.

¹⁶ Encode meanings related to actions and states, and depict certain aspects of their meanings.

a qualified teacher assisted by a BSL specialist. In Kentucky, it is intended that teaching and learning in ASL for Deaf/hard of hearing students, or for students who are learning ASL as a world language, is provided by qualified ASL teachers or interpreters. The Department of Education accepts, however, that this may not always be possible and has consequently developed an online '[ASL Survival Toolkit](#)' to support provision. In New Zealand, beginner NZSL can be taught by mainstream teachers who have had additional training but, for NZSL in the senior secondary National Certificate of Educational Achievement, teachers must be qualified NZSL teachers who can support schools directly, either through face-to-face classroom teaching, or online support.

In Wales, local authorities must ensure that pupils in mainstream schools who learn primarily through BSL are supported by appropriately qualified staff, normally a teacher of the Deaf. Schools are responsible for the teaching of BSL for other learners, and must ensure the requisite expertise and experience of these teachers. Deaf organisations in Wales [recommend](#) that, for children in the early stages of learning BSL as an additional (international) language, schools should use a BSL tutor qualified to at least two levels above that which he/she is teaching.

6.3 Resources to support Sign Language learning

As highlighted, the Deaf community is regarded as the most important resource for the teaching and learning of Sign Language because it is the origin of most of the texts and communicative situations engaged with by students. Deaf organisations and education ministries also provide support to schools, including professional development support, access to specialist expertise such as Sign Language tutors or teachers of the Deaf, and teaching and learning resources.

In New Zealand, for example, there is [Turi TV](#) – a New Zealand Sign Language educational resource, and the Ministry of Education has published a 14-lesson (3-week) series of NZSL instructional videos which covers basic NZSL and Deaf culture. Designed for 5- to 8-year-olds (in the first years of primary education), the videos were developed in 2020 as part of NZSL week and feature young people who are NZSL users. They cover topics such as the fingerspelling alphabet, getting a Deaf person's attention, numbers 1-10, days of the week, signs related to school and transport, and practice conversations. There is also a multi-media resource ([Thumbs Up](#)), intended to support the teaching and learning of NZSL as an additional language for students in Years 7-8 (ages 11-13), the first years of secondary education), who are working at the first levels (Levels 1 and 2) of The New Zealand Curriculum for NZSL.

The Welsh Government's the Hwb¹⁷ website includes a range of resources to support the learning and teaching of BSL, such as a [playlist](#)¹⁸ which supports the statements of what matters in relation to BSL. This includes, for example, resources on Deaf culture and the history of BSL to support the 'Languages connect us' statement of what matters; resources on vocabulary, grammar and linguistics, and fingerspelling, to support the 'Understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us' and 'Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication' statements of what matters; and resources including BSL fairy tales and other BSL stories, BSL poetry, BSL theatre, visual vernacular resources¹⁹, and BSL in film resources to support the 'Literature fires imagination and inspires creativity' statement of what matters. The playlist also includes resources to support BSL learning of the cross-cutting themes of relationships and sexuality education; human rights education; diversity; careers and work-related experiences; and local national and international contexts; and resources to support BSL learning across all six areas of learning and experience of the Curriculum for Wales.

In Victoria also, the [online](#) curriculum content and level descriptions for the Auslan Curriculum F-10 (ages 5-16) include links to curriculum 'Elaborations'²⁰. These advisory examples, providing guidance on how to transform the curriculum into a classroom activity or learning opportunity, include YouTube videos demonstrating some of the content. The 'advice for teachers' section in the [study design guidance](#) for the study of Auslan for the senior secondary Victorian Certificate of Education also includes lists of resources such as dictionaries, print resources, videos, websites, and organisations to contact, along with lists of possible Auslan teaching resources by theme/topic, e.g. travel, the world of work, social issues, technology etc.

¹⁷ Hwb is the digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales, providing access to a range of centrally-funded digital tools and resources in both English and Welsh. It is the Welsh Government's strategic digital channel to support the delivery of the curriculum in Wales.

¹⁸ Click on the forward arrow to the right of the screen.

¹⁹ Visual vernacular is a unique physical theatre technique, combining Sign Language with mime and gesture for artistic and poetic effect, primarily performed by Deaf artists.

²⁰ Click on a code on the page, e.g. ([VCASF001](#))

Jurisdictions, such as [New Zealand](#), also provide online Sign Language dictionaries or glossaries to support learning. In [Ontario](#), a glossary is linked to the ASL as a second language curriculum and, in [Kentucky](#), the Kentucky School for the Deaf (under the auspices of the Statewide Educational Resource Center on Deafness) provides a [webpage](#) of outreach ASL resources, which includes links to online dictionaries of ASL terms (alongside resources such as an online fingerspelling practice resource, and links to a variety of ASL topic videos). Education Wales, in its [collection](#) of YouTube video resources in BSL, also provides a BSL glossary and, in Scotland, the Scottish Sensory Centre is publishing online [BSL glossaries of curriculum terms](#).

Guidance for teachers on the curriculum in general and on designing, planning and implementing the Sign Language curriculum in particular can also include particular Sign Language features. In Wales, for example, BSL videos explain the [statements of what matters](#) of the Curriculum for Wales and, in Ontario, the curriculum expectations for ASL are explained in ASL via videos on the online ASL as a second language curriculum [webpages](#).

Headlines: how is pedagogy for Sign Language described and what features of Sign Language pedagogy can be identified?

Key features of pedagogy highlighted in curriculum guidance for the teaching and learning of Sign Language in mainstream education in the six jurisdictions include maximising Sign Language use in the classroom and the wider school environment; varying instructional strategies and approaches; reflecting Sign Language culture in teaching and learning experiences; and considering specific aspects of teaching a visual-spatial language, such as use of space and semi-circles in classroom organisation.

Authenticity is a key thread running through Sign Language pedagogy: the authenticity of learning opportunities that make learning relevant to students, authenticity in access to high-quality Sign Language learning resources which originate from the Sign Language/Deaf community, and the authenticity that comes from ensuring that teaching and learning experiences involve real-life connections and liaison with the Sign Language/Deaf community. This collaboration is crucial not only in implementing teaching and learning but also when designing and developing the curriculum.

Key enablers for effective Sign Language teaching and learning also include the availability of suitably qualified teachers and/or external specialist expertise, and of technology. The latter can play an important role, both in enabling access to authentic learning experiences with first language Sign Language users, and in facilitating access to external expertise, such as qualified Sign Language teachers or instructors.

7. Conclusions and implications: considerations for Sign Language learning

This desk study of mainstream curriculum provision in Australia: Victoria, Canada: Ontario, New Zealand, Scotland, USA: Kentucky, and Wales is timely, given the international trend towards the recognition of Sign Languages, and the impetus, in Ireland, to move forward with implementation of the provisions of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017.

The evidence and insights provided in this key findings report may be of particular relevance, given it was being drafted as the Ministers for Education and for Special Education in Ireland announced the first phase of implementation of the ISL scheme in schools, for students whose primary means of communication is ISL. The report is intended to inform NCCA's thinking for the direction of development of ISL learning in schools, and will also be of interest to policy makers and curriculum developers elsewhere, responsible for Sign Language in the curriculum.

The research has examined the key considerations at play in the six jurisdictions, including the contexts for Sign Language learning; the visions, aims, priorities and principles for the teaching and learning of Sign Language; the place and organisation of Sign Language in the curriculum; stages of development and progression in Sign Language learning; how the jurisdictions provide for assessment in Sign Language learning; and the key enablers for effective teaching and learning of Sign Languages. Its cross-sectoral (cross-phase) focus also enables NCCA to examine how Sign Languages can be incorporated in the curriculum from early childhood to post-primary education.

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Appendix 1: Glossary of jurisdiction-specific terms and abbreviations

ALN	Additional learning needs	In Wales: refers to learners who, for whatever reason, require additional learning support because they have challenges to learning in comparison with their peers.
AoLEs	areas of learning and experience	In Wales: the six curriculum areas into which subjects are grouped in the Curriculum for Wales (expressive arts; health and well-being; humanities; languages, literacy and communication; mathematics and numeracy; science and technology).
ASL	American Sign Language	Used as a primary means of communication by many Deaf people in both the United States and Canada.
ASLTA	American Sign Language Teachers Association	
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank	A number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student's overall academic achievement and position relative to all the students in their age group on completion of senior secondary education. Is used by universities to help select students for courses.
Auslan	Australian Sign Language	The recognised Sign Language in Australia.
BSL	British Sign Language	The recognised Sign Language in England, Scotland and Wales.
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence	Scotland: the curriculum for 3- to 16-year-olds.
CODA	Child of Deaf adult	
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (Wales)	A qualification in a specific subject typically taken by school students aged 14–16.
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	Federal legislation in the USA that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation, and ensures special education and related services to those children.
ISL	Irish Sign Language	The first or preferred language of Deaf people in Ireland, recognised as a native and independent minority language.

LOTE	Languages Other Than English	In Victoria (Australia). LOTE include Auslan.
	<i>Langue des Signes</i>	First Nations Sign Language – a recognised Sign Language in Ontario (Canada), alongside ASL and LSQ.
LSQ	<i>Langue des Signes Québécoise</i>	Quebec Sign Language – a recognised Sign Language in Ontario (Canada), alongside ASL.
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Advises the Minister for Education in Ireland on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools, on assessment procedures used in schools, and on examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum.
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement	The secondary school leaving qualification in New Zealand, available at one of three levels.
NZSL	New Zealand Sign Language	The recognised Sign Language and an official language in New Zealand (alongside English and <i>Te Reo Maori</i>).
OSSD	Ontario Secondary School Diploma	The high school graduation diploma.
	progression steps	In Wales: provide specific reference points of what progression looks like along a continuum as learners work towards the statements of what matters.
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework	Scotland's national qualifications framework.
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority	The national accreditation and awarding body for Scotland.
	statements of what matters	In Wales: the 27 statements across the six areas of learning and experience of the Curriculum for Wales on which schools must base their curriculum.
<i>Te Reo Maori</i>		the Maori language/Maori (New Zealand).
<i>Te Whariki</i>		The early childhood curriculum in New Zealand.
USA	United States of America	
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education	The senior secondary leaving qualification in Victoria (Australia).

Appendix 2: Glossary of key Sign Language-specific terms

classifiers	Sign Language features that clarify the message, e.g. by describing the size and shape of an object, representing the object itself, demonstrating how the object moves, or conveying how an object relates to other objects or people.
depicting verbs	encode meanings related to actions and states, and depict certain aspects of their meanings.
eye gaze	The direction in which a signer is looking, which can have convention meanings, such as marking a shift when a signer is changing character.
heritage learners	who learn Sign Language at home, but subsequently become dominant in another, usually spoken, language learners who have experience of Sign Language but for whom it is not the first language, e.g. the children of Deaf adults (CODAs)
metalinguistic knowledge metalinguistic awareness	The ability to consciously reflect on the nature of language, and language conventions, which is helpful in explaining the execution and transfer of linguistic knowledge across languages.
metacognition	The awareness of one's thought processes and an understanding of the patterns behind them
non-manual features non-manual markers non-manual signals	The various facial expressions, head tilting, shoulder raising, mouthing, and similar signals that are added to signs to create or influence meaning
Sign Language parameters	The five parameters/physical features that describe how a sign is produced and that need to be used accurately for a sign to be correct. They are handshape, palm orientation, location, movement, and non-manual signals/markers.
visual vernacular	A unique physical theatre technique, combining Sign Language with mime and gesture for artistic and poetic effect, primarily performed by Deaf artists.
voice-off	The common protocol in an Auslan class (Australia) to not use voice, as use of spoken English while signing can interfere with the acquisition of quality Auslan



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curriclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment