



**BDA**  
BRITISH **DEAF** ASSOCIATION

# Scottish Independence Referendum and the Deaf Community in Scotland



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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this consultation was to inform the Deaf community in Scotland about the Scottish Independence Referendum in their preferred language, which is British Sign Language (BSL). Representatives from the Yes Scotland and Better Together campaigns met members of the Deaf community to inform and discuss the upcoming referendum. BDA Scotland believes that the voices and opinions of Deaf people living in Scotland need to be heard in the debate about Scotland's future; Deaf people should have equal access to all information and discussions about the Scottish Independence Referendum.

# 1.1. About the British Deaf Association

The British Deaf Association (BDA) is the largest Deaf organisation in the UK that is run by Deaf people and united by shared experiences, history and, most importantly, by BSL.

Our vision is “Deaf people fully participating and contributing as equal and valued citizens in the wider society”.

Our Mission is to ensure a world in which the language, culture, community, diversity and heritage of Deaf people in the UK is respected and fully protected, ensuring that Deaf people can participate and contribute as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. This will be achieved through:

- Improving quality of life by empowering Deaf individuals and groups;
- Enhancing freedom, equality and diversity;
- Protecting and promoting BSL.

We aim to achieve our objectives through the work we carry out nationally on a daily basis. The BDA operates in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England, delivering:

- Community advocacy work – working with individuals to support them in achieving what they need.
- Community development projects – working with local Deaf communities to develop self-help groups/ forums to negotiate with local providers within local authorities or the NHS.
- Youth, children and families programmes – offering activities so they can meet with others and develop confidence in themselves.
- BSL and training programme – BSL curricula for the teaching of BSL, youth leadership, conferences, workshops.
- Policy and campaigns work.
- Membership support through area Deaf associations/special interest groups – providing support to Deaf volunteers running their area associations.
- Information provision using British Deaf News and its bilingual website.

According to the data from Census Scotland 2011, 13,000 people in Scotland said that BSL was their first or preferred language.

## 1.2. About Empowering Local Deaf Communities project

BDA Scotland was awarded funding from the Scottish Government Equalities Unit to build the capacity of the Deaf community to participate in wider developments; in particular, to engage with Independent Living activities as they develop.

Since 2011, 12 trained Deaf BSL outreach workers have been consulting the Deaf community across the whole of Scotland on a range of relevant current topics. The experiences and views of the Deaf community have been shared with the Scottish Government via written reports, along with recommendations and solutions. Recent consultations covered the following topics:

- Mental Health Strategy
- Are Deaf People Disabled?
- Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill
- Procurement Reform Bill
- Impact of Welfare Reform on the Deaf Community in Scotland\*
- See Hear Strategy
- Scottish Independence Referendum
- Scotland's Electoral Future, Delivering Improvements in Participation and Administration

# 1.3. Finding from the Impact of Welfare Reform on the Deaf Community in Scotland\* report (2013)

The findings from a 2013 consultation on the impact of welfare reform on the Deaf community encouraged us to think about ensuring that the Deaf community has full access to information and discussions about the Scottish Independence Referendum. In this consultation, the outreach workers met 275 Deaf BSL users in Scotland to explain the DWP's forthcoming welfare reform. Findings from the sessions with the Deaf BSL users were as follows:

## 1. Access to information

Lots of Deaf people felt concerned and confused about the new benefits. They felt that they were at a disadvantage in accessing DWP information which was all in written English; most could not read English and were thus unable to understand it. Most were concerned that some Deaf people may not be able to respond to their DWP letters, and would therefore lose out on benefits.

*"Most of us do not understand the system of claiming the new PIP benefit. Where can we go for support to apply for PIP?"*

At that time, BDA Scotland noted that there were no English to BSL translations on the DWP website, explaining the new benefits.

*"I find it difficult to understand the information on the website about the new benefits. I can't find the direct link to the BSL translation video clip".*

*"I dread getting letters from DWP because they are very difficult to read and understand".*

*"I have to visit my social worker to ask her to translate for me".*

## 2. Publicity about the Welfare Reform

There was not enough publicity about the upcoming changes to the benefits.

*"Lots of Deaf people do not read newspapers or watch the news on TV because they do not understand the subtitles. Most will not be aware of the upcoming changes."*

*"On the DWP literature, there is no mention of BSL translation being available on the DWP website. How will the Deaf community know about the BSL translation if they are not being informed about it?"*



*“We are grateful to the outreach workers from BDA for coming to our Deaf clubs to let us know what is happening”.*

In light of the above findings, BDA Scotland believes we have a duty to inform the Deaf community about the upcoming referendum in their first or preferred language; BSL; especially as it will be an important decision for EVERYONE living in Scotland to make.

BDA Scotland also believes that the voices and opinions of Deaf people living in Scotland need to be heard in the debate about Scotland’s future, and that Deaf people should have equal access to all information and discussions about the Scottish Independence Referendum.

## 1.4. Scottish Independence Referendum

The Scottish Independence Referendum will take place on 18 September 2014. The Referendum will ask voters to answer YES or NO to the question:

### **Should Scotland be an independent country?**

The option which gains the most votes will win the referendum, regardless of how many people turn out to vote.

#### **1. What is a Referendum?**

A referendum is a vote in which everyone is asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal. A referendum is not the same as an election where people vote for a local councillor, MSP or MP. The Scottish Independence Referendum is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for people in Scotland to have their say on this issue. Once the decision is made, it is not likely to be addressed again for a considerable period of time, unlike an election when people have the opportunity to make a different decision at the next election in four or five years' time.

#### **2. Who can vote in the Referendum?**

People will be eligible to vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum if they are British citizens living in Scotland before 2 September 2014 and are also 16 years or over on 18 September 2014. They have to be registered on the electoral register, but voting in the referendum is not compulsory. People can cast their vote in person, by postal vote or by proxy where they appoint a person that they trust to vote on their behalf.

#### **3. Why are the people living in Scotland having a Referendum?**

The Scottish National Party won a majority at the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election, having committed themselves to holding a referendum on Scottish independence. Following an agreement between the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill, setting out the arrangements for this referendum, was put forward on 21 March 2013, passed by the Scottish Parliament on 14 November 2013 and received Royal Assent on 17 December 2013. The Scottish Government launched the white paper<sup>1</sup> – Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland – on 26 November 2013. This 670 page paper outlined plans for an independent Scotland. BDA Scotland was delighted to learn that the white paper has been translated to BSL and BSL users are able to get copies of the DVD or watch it online<sup>2</sup>.

#### 4. Who represent the Yes Scotland and Better Together campaign teams?



**Yes Scotland** is the principal organisation representing the parties, organisations and individuals campaigning for a Yes vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014. The campaign is an alliance between the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Socialist Party, with collaboration from Labour for Independence. Other groups supporting a Yes vote include Women for Independence and Business for Scotland<sup>3</sup>.



**Better Together** is the principal organisation representing the parties, organisations and individuals campaigning for a No vote in the referendum. It was established with the support of the three main pro-union political parties in Scotland: Scottish Labour, the Scottish Conservative Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats<sup>4</sup>.

#### 5. What happens if there is a yes vote?

If the majority of those who vote want Scotland to be independent, then Scotland would become an independent country after a process of negotiations with the Westminster Government. Following the negotiations, Scotland would leave the UK and become a new and separate state. The Scottish Government proposes that Scotland's Independence Day will be on 24 March 2016 and elections scheduled for 5 May 2016 will be the first elections to an independent parliament.

#### 6. What happens if there is a no vote?

If the majority of those who vote want to stay part of the UK, Scotland would remain a part of the UK, with its own devolved Parliament. The Scottish and UK governments would continue to make the changes to the powers of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government that were agreed by the two parliaments in the Scotland Act 2012.

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1. [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00439021.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00439021.pdf) – Scottish Government's White Paper – Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland.

2. <http://vimeo.com/81532918> – Translation of Scottish Government's White Paper

3. [www.yesscotland.net](http://www.yesscotland.net)

4. <http://bettertogether.net>

## 2. Scottish Independence Debate

### 2.1. BDA Scotland events

BDA Scotland has worked with both campaign groups, Yes Scotland and Better Together, to deliver information to the Deaf community and encourage discussions. Representatives from both campaign groups, working with BDA Scotland's outreach workers, met 363 Deaf people from all over Scotland. The representatives were either individuals, MSPs or MPs. BDA Scotland is grateful for their time. Eighteen meetings were held between December 2013 and July 2014, in the following places:

- Aberdeen
- Coatbridge
- Dumfries
- Dundee
- Edinburgh
- Falkirk
- Galashiels
- Glasgow
- Inverness
- Kilmarnock
- Kirkcaldy
- Livingston
- Motherwell
- Wick

Outreach workers chaired the meetings and introduced the local representatives from both campaign groups. BSL/English interpreters facilitated communication between the group representatives and members of the Deaf community. The representatives gave presentations separately and the Deaf community members were encouraged to ask questions.

## 2.2. Question Time event

BDA Scotland also hosted a Question Time style event at the University of Edinburgh on Friday 21 March 2014. The event was well attended (by 82 people) and it was also live streamed on the BDA's website to allow people who weren't able to participate to watch the event<sup>5</sup>.



Figure 1: Sheila Gilmore MP of Better Together with Jemina Napier interpreting.



Figure 2: Gail Lythgoe of Yes Scotland

A BBC crew came to film the event for *See Hear*, a TV magazine programme for deaf and hard of hearing people<sup>6</sup>. The local press also came to record the event. David Buxton, BDA Chief Executive, chaired the event, with Gail Lythgoe representing the Yes Scotland campaign and Sheila Gilmore, MP for Edinburgh East, representing the Better Together campaign. There was also a Deaf panel, with John Denerley supporting the Better Together campaign and Grant Ferguson supporting the Yes Scotland campaign.



Photographs taken by Bryan Marshall, outreach worker (Falkirk/ Fife)

5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Hk1TmqGAXU&feature=youtu.be> Film of the proceedings of the Question Time event on 21 March 2014 [One participant said "Being live streamed right now the BDA Event – Scottish Independence beats telly any Friday night".]

6. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0216gpr>

# Arguments brought forward by both campaign parties

## Vote No!

By John Denerley

Better Together is a cross party campaign to keep Scotland in the UK. We believe that Scotland should take the decision in September to be part of the UK, and that will be a positive decision.

A successful Scottish Parliament and a strong UK means we get the best of both worlds; a powerful Parliament with power over things like schools, hospitals, police and transport linked to the strength and security of the UK.

It means higher spending with Scottish priorities: in Scotland we have £1,200 more per person in public spending than the UK average. Most of this extra money is spent by the Scottish Parliament on priorities we decided, such as the NHS and our schools.

There are more jobs and more customers: Scotland is a country of 5 million, but we sell our goods and services to a home market of 60 million customers.

We will continue to have a lower license fee with more programmes: small countries around us pay more for programming and services outside the UK, like iPlayer, are only accessible by paying a charge.

Devolution means that Scotland takes decisions about such things as health whilst also benefiting from services across the UK.

Keeping the pound will keep interest rates lower, as sharing a currency with our biggest market works.

Think about whether you really believe that a “yes” vote will make the problems of Scotland disappear, and whether or not the risks and costs it will take to establish a new country are really worth it when an alternative exists.

That alternative is constitutional settlement for Scotland, devolution, which preserves the best of both worlds, and requires more people across the UK to continue to work together to be the real change, we actually need not just in Scotland but across the UK.



## Vote Yes!

By Grant Ferguson

Who will care for our language and equality more? This may be an unfair question, although it is this question which BSL users in Scotland should consider in the run up to September's Independence Referendum.

Westminster can be more than a little dismissive of anything other than English, but there is evidence of a greater appetite among political parties in Scotland to interact with the Deaf community. For example, Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon addressed members of the Deaf community in Glasgow in 2011 and the Scottish Green Party became the first in the UK to produce campaign videos specifically for the Deaf and hard of hearing in 2007.

BSL is used by an estimated 13,000 people in Scotland. Under Westminster's First Past The Post voting system, we would need to live in a handful of concentrated areas to make any real difference, but the Scottish Parliament is more proportional, and this gives us the potential to collectively influence election results in a way that hasn't been possible before.

An independent Scotland will also have a written modern constitution, in which the Deaf community will take part in writing, on an equal footing with others. This will protect the rights of all minority groups, including those of BSL users. The Scottish Government will need to adhere to our rights under the constitution. With the past 300 years under the Union, we have never had one. This is the only chance to create your voice; in our community, sign language and equality.

Independence means that decisions affecting Scotland are made in Scotland. It doesn't change history and it won't tackle every issue straight away. But it does give us the means to solve our own problems and it puts the people who care most about Scotland in charge – the people who live in Scotland.

## 2.3. Key questions and concerns raised by the Deaf community at the events were:

- What difference would it make for Deaf people whether Scotland becomes independent or not? What would the benefits be for Deaf people and their families?
- Will the BSL Bill become less of a priority with the Scottish Parliament if Scotland becomes independent, or with a devolved parliament?
- Will the current level of provision for Deaf people in the UK (e.g. DLA/PIP and Access to Work funding) be continued in an independent Scotland?
- What would change in the welfare and benefits system, e.g. with DLA or PIP and Bedroom Tax?
- Some policy areas that affect Deaf people, such as education and health, have already been devolved to Scotland. How will independence affect Deaf people in a way that it is meaningful, i.e. raise deaf awareness and improve the wellbeing of Deaf people?
- Will education for Deaf children improve if Scotland becomes independent or not? Will they receive bilingual education? Will there be improved access?
- How would an independent Scotland support Deaf people to be fully included in our communities? How would Deaf people be supported if Scotland remains with the rest of the UK?
- Will Deaf people have better access to interpreters when using public services? Currently, this is poor.
- How would organisations working with Deaf people be funded?
- Will the No vote lead to increased cuts by the UK government to public services and support for disabled organisations?
- Will the Scottish Parliament have more devolved powers if we remain with the rest of the UK?
- Would Scotland stay as a member of the European Union, or would we have to apply for membership?
- Will trade from Europe be affected if Scotland is not a member of the EU?
- The SNP wants Scotland to become an independent state and keep the pound. Will they be able to ensure economic stability? Would Scotland still use the pound; would we join the Euro or would we set up our own currency?
- How will Scotland cope in a credit crisis if we don't have support from the Bank of England?
- Will we pay higher taxes in an independent country?



- How much debt would Scotland take on to pay for things like pensions, welfare and bank bailouts?
- What will happen to our state pensions?
- Will we continue receiving free NHS prescriptions and personal care in an independent Scotland or devolved Scotland?
- How much would it cost Scotland to set up embassies in other countries, create an army and pay for a bigger government?
- How much influence would a small country like Scotland have in the world?
- Given recent events in Ukraine, which became independent from Russia, are we stronger together?
- Would we need a passport to cross the Scottish/English border?
- What are the job prospects for Deaf people living in Scotland whether the Yes or No vote wins? Will the Yes vote lead to increased jobs in the future?
- Will the minimum wage be increased?
- If you work in England but live in Scotland, will this cause a problem?
- Who will have access to the oil and gas if Scotland becomes independent?
- Will manufacturing sector in Scotland be affected by the vote?
- Will Scotland build or provide more council houses?
- Who will build the houses? Local companies or English companies?
- We are concerned about the number of wind turbines being built in Scotland; they are destroying the beautiful landscape. Will the Scottish Government reduce or increase the number of wind farms?
- Will the Queen be still our monarch? Will people living in Scotland continue to pay tax to the Queen? Will she continue to keep her estates in Scotland?
- Why do we have to contribute to the rest of the UK when they are affected by something like, for example, flooding earlier in the year? Will this continue with a devolved Scottish Parliament?

The various campaign representatives gave their opinions on the general issues raised at each meeting. On issues pertaining to Deaf people in Scotland, all representatives were clear that their campaign groups did not yet have all the answers, but they all undertook to refer the questions/issues back to their groups for more considered answers.

## 2.4. Feedback from the Deaf community

Participants were asked to evaluate each event afterwards. Their feedback was as follows:

- Before coming to the meetings, 57% of the Deaf participants knew nothing, or very little, about the upcoming referendum.
- 96% of the Deaf participants valued the opportunity to receive information from both campaign parties.
- 48% of the Deaf participants had gained confidence and now knew who to vote for. A further 48% were unsure; a similar percentage to other communities in Scotland.
- 27 representatives from both referendum campaign teams also valued the opportunity to listen to the views and experiences of Deaf people living in Scotland.

### 3. Conclusion

By holding these meetings, members of the Deaf community were provided with the opportunity to take part and to raise questions, issues and concerns. The meetings also served the purpose of making the various representatives of the referendum campaign groups aware of the concerns and issues that affect Deaf people in Scotland.

BDA Scotland is grateful to the Scottish Government for providing the funding that made this consultation possible. Thanks are also due to the representatives of the referendum campaign groups and the members of the Deaf community who showed a keen interest in the process.

To contact the British Deaf Association please look at our website: [www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk)

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