June 2025

# Sign language GCSE

Following the threat of a possible legal challenge by the family of a 12 year old deaf boy in 2018, the education minister Nick Gibb confirmed soon afterwards that the DfE was working to produce draft subject content for a new GCSE in British Sign Language (BSL). This news was very well received, particularly by the National Deaf Children's Society.

In December 2023, the DfE announced a consultation on the development of the new exam. The consultation, which looked at high level principles for how the qualification would be assessed, duly took place.

The DfE had initially pledged that the new GCSE would be taught from September 2025, but Ofqual warned at the time that it very probably would not be possible to have everything ready within that time frame.

Although a pilot BSL GCSE has been prepared by the exam board Signature, it had not been put through the necessary rigorous accreditation process.

## The accreditation process

It is Ofqual that ensures that the assessments are valid, reliable and fair for all students.

Before a qualification is accredited, Ofqual has to determine assessment rules and produce guidance .It then goes through the following process:

- There has to be an independent review by at least two subject experts and Ofqual staff.
- A panel then considers the findings.
- Final decisions on accreditation are taken by independent members of the regulator.

Extensive collaborative work has indeed been carried out over the past 18 months. This has involved working with awarding organisations and BSL subject matter specialists, including those within the deaf community, to ensure that the new qualification will be high quality.

## An inevitable delay

As predicted by Ofqual, the accreditation process is not yet complete. So it was announced in a press release on 30 April 2025 that Ofqual has launched a second consultation, lasting until 25 June 2025, on the specific rules that will govern the assessment of the new GCSE.

The outcome of the consultation will be published in September 2025.

Ofqual has not clarified when the qualification will be rolled out. They say the timeline depends on exam

## *Contents*

*CEFM assists schools to keep up-to-date with current issues.*

*Sign language GCSE* 1

*Inclusion 2028* 2

*Secondary teacher workforce* 3

*Who to contact* 4

boards, who are in the process of developing their offers.

None of the boards would provide details on a potential timeline, but AQA did comment that it 'depended on various factors'.

The current guess is that the earliest the course would be taught is September 2028, with the first exams in 2030.

Associations for the deaf have commented that the delay is disheartening and disappointing. However, one spokesman did acknowledge that it is important that the course is robust and credible, and that it met pupils' needs.

## Inclusion 2028

Evidence shows that a positive experience in PE and school sport is essential to shape a child's life.

Data suggests that not all young disabled people have been fully included in PE. Disabled children's activity levels tend to decrease significantly as they get older. Research shows that disabled children are twice as likely to be lonely, to feel they have no one to talk to or to feel left out.

In 2021, the DfE funded a three-year programme entitled 'Inclusion 2024' which aimed to improve the quality of schools' physical education and sports provision for pupils with SEND. The belief is that by improving provision it could increase the opportunity for SEND pupils to achieve the Chief Medical Officer's guide lines of a minimum of 20 active minutes a day.

The work has been delivered through a network of lead inclusion schools across England, who are recognised for their expertise in engaging young people with SEND to participate, compete and lead through PE, physical activity and school sport.

Lead inclusion schools have acted as champions in their local area – staging events, providing advice, guidance and support, and signposting training and good practice.

Over the three years since its launch, experiences have rapidly improved for disabled children. Young people have been taking part in more inclusive and accessible PE lessons, school swimming and para sports, thereby learning key life and leadership skills.

The programme has brought about change by including support systems, working with a range of stakeholders and empowering an expert network of schools which have a wealth of insights and experiences in making PE and sport inclusive around the country.

Nevertheless there is continuing awareness that too many pupils with SEND still face barriers to participation in PE and school sport. So the government has decided to extend this initiative for a further three years. In May 2025, a renewed programme was launched, entitled Inclusion 2028. The renewed programme is designed to further improve access to PE and school sport for pupils with SEND.

The programme will work with a network of 50 Youth Sport Trust lead schools to provide expert training to teachers to help deliver lessons which will meet the needs of pupils, especially those with physical, sensory, cognitive, communication or social and emotional needs.

The government intends to work with over 8,000 schools to 'upskill 10,000 teachers and practitioners' in order to improve PE and sports for upwards of 240,000 pupils with SEND. The plan also is to set up 600 new extra-curricular clubs.

The funding for the first year is £300,000 and the DfE has said that the funding for the two subsequent years will be up to £300,000 per year – to be confirmed in June's spending review.

(This is in line with the DfE's overall school PE and sport plan, originally announced in March 2023 that aimed to guarantee two hours physical activities per week in school to both boys and girls.)

### Expert support via lead inclusion schools

The Inclusion 2028 programme will be delivered by a consortium of:

- Youth Sport Trust (YST).
- Paralympics GB.
- Swim England.
- Activity Alliance.
- Nasen.

These will be supported by the Association for PE, the National Network of Parent-Carer Forums and Sport for Confidence.

The majority of the funding is provided directly to the lead inclusion schools network. The Youth Sport Trust says that the resources training will be freely

available via the lead schools for every school in England to access, whether it is face-to-face, online, recorded or resource-based.

### Targeted interventions to deliver impact

These will include:

- Youth leadership opportunities that empower pupils with or without SEND.
- There will be inclusive sports festivals, inspired by the upcoming Commonwealth Games and Paralympics.
- Tailored CPD will help to build staff knowledge and confidence.
- Resources and tools are being designed to adapt PE and school sport to meet every learner's needs.

Schools in England can begin engaging with Inclusion 2028 programme by:

- Exploring free inclusive PE resources.
- Connecting with their local lead inclusion school.
- Emailing the Youth Support Trust team to find out more.

## Secondary teacher workforce

The DfE's latest report on the teacher workforce in both secondary and further education 2024/25 has just been published. In this summary, however, we concentrate, where possible, mainly on the parts of the report directly dealing with staffing in schools.

The DfE considers that the school workforce will impact the government's ability to achieve its growth and opportunity missions first set out in summer 2024. Teacher shortages can mean that quality of teaching is affected if schools then use non-specialists or supply teachers, have larger classes or limit the subjects offered.

The DfE currently sees not having enough teachers as a significant issue impacting educational outcomes for children and young people.

### Key data

- There were 217,600 full-time equivalent secondary teachers in 2023/24, which is an increase on the previous year of more than 1,500.
- The DfE's estimated total budget for recruitment and retention initiatives for 2024/25 in secondary schools and FE is £700 million.
- Just 62% of the DfE's target for the number of secondary school postgraduate teaching trainees in 2024/25 was met (the DfE has only met its own target once in the past ten years).
- The DfE currently estimates that 1,600 additional secondary teachers will be needed by 2027 to meet the demand from growing pupil numbers.

The report only looks at teacher numbers rather than whether teachers deliver good quality education.

### Main findings

There is a longstanding nationwide teacher shortage with teacher numbers not increasing in line with pupil numbers.

In secondary schools, pupil-teacher ratios have increased.

- Teacher numbers have been impacted by challenges in both recruiting and retaining teachers.
- Recruitment and retention challenges were worse for certain subjects and schools in deprived areas.
- The DfE may have a good understanding of secondary school teacher numbers, but its modelling of future requirements does not build in known shortages, nor indicate the total numbers of teachers needed.
- Evidence suggests that pay increases have more impact on teacher numbers than other initiatives, but there are affordability implications and teachers' real-terms pay was 10% less in 2024 than in 2010.
- In 2024/25, the DfE budgeted to spend around £700 million on wide ranging financial and non-financial initiatives (excluding pay) designed to improve recruitment and retention.
- The DfE has limited evidence on the effectiveness of initiatives to improve workload or wellbeing, despite these being common reasons for teachers leaving.
- The DfE is taking innovative steps to consider challenges across the education sector as a whole and to start comparing the costs and benefits of certain initiatives.
- Given the upcoming multi-year spending review, the DfE has

not yet agreed plans setting out how it will achieve, and routinely monitor progress towards, the manifesto pledge of 6,500 more teachers across the sectors by 2029.

- The extent to which this pledge will address current and expected teacher shortages depends on how it will be delivered across schools and FE.

## Conclusions

- Having enough good quality teachers is fundamental to achieving positive outcomes for all secondary school and FE students.

  Although the DfE has taken positive steps in seeking to understand and increase teacher numbers, there remains a shortage of teachers, particularly in certain subjects and in disadvantaged areas.

- Secondary school pupil numbers are going to rise over the next few years, yet it is not clear whether government plans and pledges will fully address current and expected teacher shortages.

  In developing its plans in line with the June 2025 multi-year spending review, the DfE is considering how to split this pledge across different educational settings, taking into account the fiscal environment and demographic changes.

  Following on from this, to be confident of allocating available funding in a way that delivers value for money, it needs to continue building the evidence base and exploring opportunities to consider challenges from a system perspective.

## Recommendations

To address the continuing challenges with teacher recruitment and retention, and in the hope of recruiting 6,500 new teachers by 2029, the DfE should do the following.

- The DfE should develop cross sector data and insights across schools and FE. This is to understand career paths and the unintended impact of sector-focused initiatives, and to create a cross-sector approach.

- In trying to meet the 6,500 pledge, the DfE should fully assess, balance and manage the implications for value for money, affordability, response to future teaching demands and demographics, and the extent to which it can deliver its long-term aims.

- Following any announcement of the spending review settlement, the DfE should provide greater transparency around what the 6,500 pledge means in practice for the school sector, with a published delivery plan setting out objectives, responsibilities, milestones, how increases will be measured and how to report progress.

- The DfE should extend its evidence base of what works to recruit and retain teachers to include non-financial initiatives, and analyse the relative costs and benefits of initiatives to decide where to prioritise resources.

- The DfE should consider what more it can do to encourage those undertaking teacher training to move into teaching jobs in the state-funded sector, and ensure the right types of students enrol on training, particularly for subjects that are seeing the greatest attrition.

## *Who to contact*

CEFM provides a full range of services to schools. Information on our support services can be found at www.cefm.co.uk. We also provide information to subscribing schools via CEFM*i*, our comprehensive policy, guidance and advice web service, which can also be found at www.cefm.co.uk.

For further information, please contact: CEFM on 01494 459183.

Centre for Education & Finance Management Limited,
M1A Mosquito Studios, De Havilland Court,
Penn Street, Amersham, HP7 0PX
Telephone: 01494 459183
Email: info@cefm.co.uk
Web: www.cefm.co.uk

This document includes extracts taken from government circulars © crown copyright 2025. Reproduced under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

No responsibility for loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from action as a result of any material in this newsletter can be accepted by CEFM Limited. Detailed advice should always be obtained before acting or refraining from action.