



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

May 2018

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about British Sign Language (BSL) as a GCSE.

BSL is a vital method of communication for many people and the first or preferred language for an estimated 70,000 deaf people across the country. I know that colleagues in the Department for Education are committed to the education of all children and young people with special educational needs or disability, including those with a hearing impairment.

I am encouraged that schools may choose to offer BSL as part of their wider school curriculum or varied programme of extra-curricular activities. Schools can also offer accredited BSL qualifications. I also welcome the fact that BSL is now an alternative to a level 1 and level 2 qualification in English when undertaking an apprenticeship. This enables those who use BSL to complete their apprenticeship without having to achieve another English qualification. I have been assured by colleagues in the Department for Education that the Government does not object in principle to the development of a GCSE in BSL. However, I know that schools have asked for a period of stability to provide them with a chance to embed the extensive reforms to GCSEs and A levels. For this reason, the Secretary of State has committed to making no further reforms to GCSEs or A levels in this Parliament.

I understand the Department for Education has indicated to Signature, the awarding organisation proposing to develop the GCSE, that it is open to considering a proposal for a new GCSE for possible introduction in the longer term. The development of new qualifications is a lengthy process which is likely to take several years, but I remain confident that any proposals will be considered very carefully and I will continue to follow this matter with great interest.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY