

Phase 9 spotlight

Scottish Child
Abuse Inquiry

FEBRUARY 2026

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) began hearing evidence relating to Phase 9 of its investigations in April 2025. The evidence heard related to the provision of residential care in establishments for children and young people with long-term healthcare needs, additional support needs, and disabilities. These hearings concluded in October 2025.

A range of organisations were involved in the provision of care examined in Phase 9, including the National Health Service, local authorities, voluntary providers, and private providers.

Towards the end of the case study, the focus was on some residential schools which provided care for deaf or visually impaired children, including St Vincent's School for the Deaf and Blind, Glasgow; the Royal Blind School, Edinburgh; and Donaldson's School for the Deaf, also in Edinburgh.

Phase 9 spanned 43 days and heard evidence relating to 133 witnesses, across 17 institutions. This included the evidence of 63 applicants. Approximately 11,500 documents were ingathered as relevant to the case study.



**Case study spanned
43 days**



**17
institutions**



**Approximately
11,500 documents
ingathered**



**133
witnesses**



**Evidence of
63 applicants**

Adjustments for applicants and witnesses

Phase 9 evidence presented new challenges, in terms of taking evidence from deaf witnesses and visually impaired witnesses, and in terms of how that evidence could be made accessible to all members of the public including, for example, those who are deaf.

Preparation for the case study hearings started 18 months before they began.

The SCAI team had early engagement with support organisations across the relevant sectors to ascertain what special requirements people would need and how best to meet those needs.

Members of the team also had a series of meetings with those most affected by the Phase 9 hearings, asking what they needed to help them when engaging with the process.

A significant amount of time was spent looking at best practice with a view to making necessary adjustments, and supporting all individual witnesses to provide their evidence in the most appropriate way for them. This was a learning experience for all and we are grateful to applicants, witnesses, and support organisations for their cooperation.

Find out more about SCAI on the website: www.childabuseinquiry.scot

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Lady Smith
The Chair of SCAI

The Right Honourable
Lady Smith

I am Lady Smith, and I chair

BSL interpreters

SCAI aimed to ensure appropriate interpreters were available whenever needed. However, one of the main challenges was the limited number of suitably qualified interpreters in Scotland who do this work. Inevitably, they are in high demand. To address this, the team partnered with Just Sign – an award-winning organisation recognised as the gold standard for court interpretation.

With Just Sign's support, SCAI was able to ensure all proceedings were interpreted in BSL for deaf witnesses and for any deaf members of the public attending the hearings.

Accessible materials

SCAI provided a range of options for applicants, including audio, Braille, and British Sign Language (BSL).

A suite of easy read materials was written and published, ensuring that information was accessible and available to all witnesses.

A series of videos was also created to help people understand how SCAI works. They cover how to apply, how to give evidence, and what happens when you attend hearings. These videos were made so as to incorporate subtitles and BSL interpretation.

Self-care leaflets were made available along with BSL interpretation of their content, and witnesses were given the opportunity to go through their statement with a BSL translator if they wished to do so.

Much work was done to ensure the SCAI website was as accessible as possible. This included increasing font sizes, adjusting colour contrasts, and introducing 'Recite Me' – a tool that allows visitors to customise how they view and interact with the website. Features such as a built-in screen reader, which reads text aloud, and options for alternative formats, including Braille translations, enable everyone to access the information in a way that suits their needs.

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Information for other witnesses who are attending a public hearing

Easy Read

About this document

This is Easy Read information.

You can find other information on our website:

www.childabuseinquiry.scot

A friend, family member, or support person may be able to help you read this document.



'It's been a privilege for Just Sign to work alongside SCAI to ensure deaf witnesses and members of the public have full access to proceedings in their own language.'

'By ensuring every deaf person engaging with the Inquiry could do so through qualified interpreters, we helped make the process truly inclusive – ensuring every voice could be heard and every story understood.'

Donna Jewell, Director of Just Sign

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Find out more about SCAI on the website: www.childabuseinquiry.scot

Hearing Room



Changes to the hearings suite

In the hearings suite, two experienced BSL signers were seated beside senior counsel to the Inquiry. They interpreted the evidence given by the witnesses, usually swapping over every 20 minutes.

When giving their evidence, witnesses who are deaf also had the assistance of a deaf-registered intermediary who had a separate interpreter to assist him. The intermediary was an independent specialist in deaf communication. He helped witnesses to understand what was happening at the hearings, and helped them to be understood when providing their evidence.

A BSL interpreter was also available in the public gallery to enable any deaf person attending hearings to understand the evidence and to communicate with any member of the Inquiry team if they wished to do so.

Another BSL interpreter worked with the camera operators to ensure that the cameras switched to deaf

witnesses, so that deaf members of the public watching the evidence in the gallery did not miss any of the deaf witnesses' signing.

For visually impaired witnesses, the tables were brought closer together and efforts made to ensure there were fewer visual distractions. A guide dog also attended hearings.

Witnesses' sight issues were addressed by using larger fonts and, for blind witnesses, there were audio descriptions outlining where people were in relation to them and what their roles were, all to try and make witnesses feel as settled and as comfortable as possible.



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The outcome





Phase 9 presented new and complex challenges, but it also marked a significant milestone in establishing SCAI's inclusive and accessible processes. Through early planning, collaboration, and a deep commitment to understanding individual needs, SCAI aimed to create an environment in which everyone could fully participate.

This phase of SCAI's investigations offered the opportunity to work closely with deaf and visually impaired individuals and, along with dedicated support organisations, helped shape a model of engagement rooted in respect, accessibility, and trauma-informed practice.

Phase 9 has been a learning experience for all. It is hoped that SCAI's experiences will inform accessibility practices more widely across Scotland's justice system.

Contact

SCAI encourages anyone with relevant information to get in touch with the Inquiry's Witness Support Team:

-  **by phone** on 0800 0929 300
-  **by email** at talktous@childabuseinquiry.scot
-  **by post** at PO Box 24202
Edinburgh EH3 1JN
-  **British Sign Language (BSL)** users can contact the Inquiry direct through its online sign language interpreter at www.ContactScotland-bsl.org



Deaf or hard-of-hearing people can contact the Inquiry using the **Relay UK** service – just download the app onto your smartphone, tablet, or computer.



The **SCAI website** includes a range of features to improve accessibility such as 'Recite Me' and a series of short BSL videos.



Regular updates will be provided on SCAI's website www.childabuseinquiry.scot

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