

## Response ID ANON-PYJC-FR12-H

Submitted to Sign Language Bill - Call for Evidence  
Submitted on 2025-05-09 15:34:41

### Consent and introduction

What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Please confirm you have read the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee privacy notice by clicking the button below.

I have read the privacy notice

Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report?

Yes, publish but with my personal information and any content that could be used to identify me redacted.

### Clause 1

Do you feel Clause 1 goes far enough in formally recognising BSL and ISL as languages of Northern Ireland?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

BSL/ISL should be treated equally however it is vital that BSL/ISL is kept within the cultural minority group as we need access to information because our method of communication is sign language. The Disability legislation mentions if you can write, do you understand English, this is not relevant, it is important that we are recognised as a Cultural Linguistic minority group.

In relation to the word 'recognise', back in 2004 the then Secretary of State announced that BSL was recognised as an official language in N Ireland, but it wasn't recognised strongly enough to have a Bill to protect it. Maybe we need to think of a different word than 'recognise', one that would make more of an impact.

### Clause 2

Do you feel Clause 2 goes far enough in promoting the use of BSL and ISL and developing deaf culture?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

I feel that the Department for Communities is the right department to take the lead to promote BSL/ISL, Deaf Culture etc. When the Secretary of State officially recognised BSL/ISL as an official language in NI, soon after the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as it was then, established a Sign Language Partnership Group in 2004. This is still in existence and that has been running for over 20 years, they have experience with working and consulting with various Deaf organisations and Government departments. I also feel that Government Departments have more power, more clout, to make an impact than Deaf charities, Deaf businesses etc. I do feel it is important that a government department takes the lead in promoting sign language, etc as the other departments will then follow suit.

Also promoting and offering sign language for Deaf children and their families, carers etc., is a great strand, however I would like to add that the class tutor must be a Deaf tutor, it states 'other person' to teach, I disagree with this, it must be a Deaf tutor or trainer that delivers the classes.

Are there any other approaches (apart from providing for the availability of classes) that could help to meet the objective of the greater use and understanding of BSL and ISL?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

The Department of Communities, Department of Education and the Department of Health needs to ensure they work together to encourage a blended service. When a baby is born and diagnosed Deaf they need to focus on the positives and provide them with a vast range of options ensuring the parents can then make an informed choice. It appears that the guidelines for newly diagnosed babies all lead to audiology and doctors, I feel as these professionals must follow the guidelines that sign language should be included in the guidelines and therefore parents will be informed of sign language as an option. It is not appropriate that they are always tempted by the Medical Model, ie Cochlear Implants etc. The Medical professionals should remain neutral and pass on the options that are available to the parents, no bias should be involved. If the parents do pick sign language that child will then be immersed in the language at an early age and hence aide language development.

### Clause 3

Do you think the duty placed on prescribed organisations to make the information and services accessible to members of the deaf community is sufficient?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Organisations and Government departments have been given the duty to ensure information and services are accessible to the Deaf community and to ensure there is no additional fee to the members of the Deaf community is great, however, I feel the word 'reasonable' is misleading. Deaf people take the term 'reasonable adjustments' to mean something totally different than what Government departments define it as. Reasonable could mean financial, weak as in they are given responsibility to make adjustments but they are not robust reasonable adjustments, just a token effort being made, where is the 'enforcement' for reasonable adjustments.

### Clause 4

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

As DFC have responsibility for holding the list of prescribed organisations, I am aware that all government departments are automatically covered including Health Trusts, the Department of Justice etc. I am also aware that for the Private and Charitable sectors it is going to take time following on from the consultations and best practice guidelines etc, however once all these changes have been implemented, I do have my concerns about how this is going to work, e.g., the Department of Justice, including the PSNI, the Court service are all automatically covered in the list of prescribed organisations but if a Deaf person is going through the court system and they need a solicitor and that solicitor is from the private sector, how will this work? If the solicitor is paid by the Department of Justice that is fine, but if not, how will this process work smoothly? From the moment of arrest to the actual court appearance how smoothly will this process of ensuring the service is accessible run for the Deaf person without any issues or should the solicitor be listed under the Department of Justice to ensure full accessibility without any additional cost to the Deaf person?

### Clause 5

Do you support the approach to consultation required in Clause 5?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

A Sign Language Partnership Group had already been established by DFC for quite some years now, from 2004. This group included representatives from each Deaf organisation, plus both Interpreting bodies ASLI and VLP, and various governmental representatives. I think it is best if they are left to take the lead as they are doing now. They are the experts in the area as they have knowledge and experience as they have been meeting and discussing these issues over the years.

Now that things are changing, maybe DFC should consider a separate "informal" steering group led by an independent & neutral Deaf person, not a representative from any Deaf organisation. This steering group would be where young Deaf people, teenagers, parents of Deaf children, Deaf clubs, Deaf refugees, for those Deaf people who have not been exposed to these consultations and do not have the confidence to attend and have their voice heard. It is vital that we get feedback from all realms of the community, not just the professionals. This independent Deaf person would gather feedback and pass it back to the Department of Communities to ensure there is true representation from throughout the community.

## Clause 6

Do you support the approach taken in this clause?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Back in the day DCAL as it was known, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure had already created a best practice guidelines which had been consulted on with the SLPG and a steering group had been involved to focus on creating these guidelines which were very useful but they do need a revamp as it is outdated and there have been many changes over the years. The DFC have the knowledge, experience and networks to provide guidance and play a supportive role and supporting other Departments, maybe DFC could possibly consider appointing a Deaf organisation (on behalf of DFC) who would have a duty to create an updated version of the Best Practice Guidelines. It might be a good idea to have a steering group made up of representatives from Deaf organisations who could then support the lead & appointed Deaf organisation to create the Best Practice Guidelines. This would then show equity of views from throughout the community.

Do you feel there is anything else this Clause should include?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

## Clause 7

Do you support the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations detailed in Clause 7?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Yes it is important to continue with the consultations with stakeholders and the Deaf community to ensure information is always up to date and relevant to the Bill as things now change so quickly, technology, community changes, refugees coming to NI etc therefore continuous consultation is vital.

Do you support the approach to consultation detailed in Clause 7?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

See above

## Clause 8

Do you feel the level of consultation required in Clause 8 is sufficient?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

I do feel the level of consultation is sufficient as this has been ongoing for a considerable time, since the sign language partnership group was established back in 2004. They brought in an independent body, Deaf Answers to do the "ten-years" Road Map in 2010, the Road Map was then reviewed in 2014. They commissioned the British Deaf Association back in 2017/18 to collate feedback from the Deaf Community, to which they received over 500 responses. DFC also carried out their own road show travelling about NI explaining what they had been doing to date, importantly, they have also released funding to various Deaf organisations, etc to deliver many projects that contributed to the progress of the ten-year Roadmap. These mainly focused on building capacity to train Deaf people to develop skills and experiences and to become confident enough to participate in community life, plus building capacity of qualified sign language interpreters.

DFC have been doing what they needed to do for the community and reaping the rewards, through the various businesses and organisations that they have funded, they received reports and this also helps DFC identify issues, gaps in services etc and also to establish what is working well. It is another vital way of receiving feedback.

## Clause 9

Do you think evaluating the impact of the Bill in a report every five years is an appropriate length of time?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

I appreciate that the Bill will need reported on but am not sure if every 5 years is appropriate. Once the Bill is in place, organisations, departments, service providers etc are going to need time to fully understand the implications of the Bill and then to implement changes. It might be more useful to have an interim report after 3 years to review the progress, rather than wait to the end of 5 years. This should help reduce errors and also help to encourage and educate people on the correct way to implement changes. Also, after 5 years there could be many changes, technology being updated society etc., I think five years to start off the Bill and then every three years is a better timeframe to have a review.

## Clause 10

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

Yes I support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers. Currently in NI deaf people can become tutors by successfully completing their PGCE in relation to Higher Education but there is no formal body of registration for teachers to register, this is the same in the UK. It is important to be aware that BSL GCSE is only provided in England, if the opportunity arose for it to be taught in Northern Ireland, our deaf tutors would need to be qualified to teach in Primary and Secondary schools to deliver the GCSE. Do they need a separate qualification for this? There is a need to research and see if there is a Teaching register that our Deaf tutors could register with or have discussions with Signature for them to create a register for all Deaf tutors in the UK to register with.

I believe the Department for Communities should be the lead Government Department to promote the training and registration of Deaf tutors, just to clarify that Deaf tutors are the most appropriate people to teach Sign Language, not hearing people. It is paramount for the DfC to consult with Deaf experts as we have approx 25 Deaf teachers in Scotland and lots more in England and it would be great if a pool of Deaf teachers can take the lead in developing a course for Deaf teachers.

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

I do not support the creation of a new scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL Interpreters. We don't need to set this up as there already is a scheme through Signature which has been running for quite some time and they have set the 'standards' high for those Deaf or Hearing people who have Level 6 BSL/ISL to progress to Level 6 Interpreting enabling them to register as a qualified Sign Language Interpreter or for Deaf people to register as a Qualified Translator. When we become qualified, we also have a registration body, NRCPD, National Register of Communication Professionals with Deaf/Deafblind people who are well known throughout the UK to all professionals, service providers etc. It is well known that we carry either a purple badge when training or a yellow badge when qualified. We adhere to their Code of Conduct, guidelines etc., every registered Interpreter/Translator is well aware of NRCPD as they must register with them.

The financial implications to start about setting up a new register and system I feel are not worth it when there already is a robust system and registration body out there which works very well.

Both Translators and Interpreters, Deaf/Hearing can become members of either ASLI, Association of Sign Language Interpreters or VLP, Visual Language Professionals. When our training is complete and we register as Qualified we then will register with either Professional Body. All these systems are in place and have been running successfully for a long time, there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

## Clause 11

Do you agree with the definition of the deaf community provided for in the Bill?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer. Please outline what people or groups you think should be included or excluded and why.

Text box for entering additional information:

I agree with the a) b) and c) definition of the Deaf community

Yes I think the definition of the Deaf community in the Bill is broad enough to cover everyone in the Deaf community, including young children and Deaf people who have grown up in Mainstream education and service, communicated orally and in later years decided to learn to sign.

Also those Deaf people for who BSL/ISL is not a first language as they have moved to NI from other countries to settle here. I feel it should be included somewhere that they should be welcomed into our community in a similar way by providing an intensive BSL/ISL course which would help them feel comfortable here in NI.

Having hearing people (with little or no speech) is a very "grey area" which need to be explored/consulted further. The majority of hearing people have ample opportunities to avail of, they have full access to information, to services, their everyday is open and accessible, they glean information from so many resources on a daily basis, this is not the case for the Deaf community.

## Clause 12

Do you agree with the definition of BSL and ISL provided for in the Bill?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.

Text box for entering additional information:

I do agree with the definition of BSL and ISL in the Bill. They have included Deaf, Deafblind and I would like to see Deaf Refugees included in this definition as their first and preferred language will not be BSL/ISL as they will have their own indigenous sign language. I feel if they were offered classes to teach them BSL/ISL it would help them feel part of the community as they will be able to converse

## Clause 13

Do you agree with the definition of "everyday reliance" provided in the Bill?

Yes

Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.

Text box for entering additional information:

The definition of "everyday reliance" is appropriate

## Any other comments

Is there anything which you expected the Bill to make provision for which has not been included in the Bill?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

If you have any other comments in relation to the Bill please tell us here.

Text box to enter additional details: