

## Response ID ANON-PYJC-FRR2-J

Submitted to Sign Language Bill - Call for Evidence  
Submitted on 2025-05-09 23:40:19

### Consent and introduction

What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

[REDACTED]

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 in full.

### 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:

British Sign Language is the language of my heart. It is the core of who I am.

[REDACTED] I was very fortunate to have and acquire a language that was completely accessible to me from birth. I am also extremely fortunate to have parents and a granny with a strong interest in education, who pushed me to reach my fullest potential. They all ensured that I grew up bilingually, both in BSL and written English.

I would not be the person I am today if I had not had access to BSL as my first language. That strong grounding in my first language became a springboard that enabled me to acquire English as my second language with ease.

It is paramount to preserve the architecture of existing disability and equality legislation. I personally believe that we in the Deaf community have a dual identity. We are both disabled and part of a linguistic minority. We are a unique group of people.

It is important to highlight that Deaf people are not the same as other disabled groups. For example, blind people or those in wheelchairs face physical barriers, whereas our barriers are mainly related to communication.

People with other disabilities can participate in the Paralympics if they wish to, whereas Deaf people would be socially excluded in Paralympics. Instead, we have our own event - the Deaflympics - where we can participate and communicate with each other through International Sign Language, which is beyond words. The Deaf community - both athletes and supporters - always waits with anticipation for the Deaflympics every four years. Yet sadly, the Deaflympics is neither recognised nor funded by the government.

For the Deaf community, it is about language and communication. But that doesn't mean we can deny that we are disabled - we have lost one of our five senses, and there is no arguing with that. Or at least, one of our senses is impaired, depending on the person's level of hearing loss, and because of that, we face barriers on a daily basis.

Of course, when I am in a room full of Deaf people and those who can sign, it is easy to forget that I am disabled, because Sign Language and Deaf culture are so beautiful and vibrant. I am a very proud member of the Deaf community, which spans across the world, and it is such a privilege to be part of that.

So, in conclusion, Deaf people are disabled, but we are also proud members of a linguistic minority. Sign Language (preferably from birth) is a gift that helps us to thrive, reach our fullest potential, and become healthy and contributing members and citizens of society.

I will end with a beautiful quote:

“As long as we have Deaf people on earth we will have signs, and as long as we have our films we can preserve our beautiful sign language in its original purity. It is my hope that we will all love and guard our beautiful sign language as the noblest gift God has given to deaf people.”  
— George Veditz (1913)

## Clause 2

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

BSL and ISL classes are useful, but we need to do much more than that.

Non-deaf babies naturally acquire language through their parents and their environment, but deaf babies and toddlers do not have the same opportunities.

Deaf babies and toddlers need access to fluent sign language users as role models. Parents also require support and guidance on how to communicate visually with their deaf child. This helps build a solid foundation in a primary language, while also allowing for the appropriate introduction of English, enabling the development of bilingual skills. We need to create pathways for Deaf individuals to gain early years qualifications.

It would be excellent to establish a course in collaboration with a provider such as Queen's University, funded by the government, specifically for both Deaf and non-deaf individuals interested in working with deaf children aged 0–8. One suggestion is to create a tailored “Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies” at Queen's University. The course could offer an additional module that leads to a BSL Level 6 qualification, so that graduates leave with both early years and sign language qualifications.

This initiative would increase opportunities for deaf children to be exposed bilingually to English and signed languages during their preschool years in Northern Ireland. At this age, deaf children are at a crucial stage of language development and need strong language models in both BSL and English—ideally at Level 6 and above.

I want to reiterate that focusing on the pre-school stage is essential before turning our attention to primary or post-primary education. Hearing babies naturally acquire language from their environment and parents, but deaf babies and toddlers need much more support to reach the same milestones. They must be exposed to age-appropriate communication so they can build a strong foundation in their primary language while gradually being introduced to English to develop bilingual skills.

There has been recent discussion about including CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) in pre-school education. I think this presents many exciting possibilities. CODAs' home language is often BSL or ISL, and it makes perfect sense for them to continue learning in that language at the preschool stage. With that strong grounding, they are likely to become proficient bilinguals.

██████████ a BSL nursery established by educational psychologist Susan Phoenix in 1982. The nursery included a mix of Deaf children and CODAs and was a great success.

There has also been discussion about whether CODAs should continue their education in sign language schools up to the age of eleven. While it's a possibility, I believe we need evidence to determine whether this is practical. I see clear feasibility for preschool education (ages 0–4), but beyond that, from age 4 onward, more research and evidence are needed to assess its viability.

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:

We Need Deaf Leaders to Secure the Future.

We need Deaf leaders in order to achieve the objectives outlined above. There is an urgent need for bilingual education infrastructure and schools in Northern Ireland to preserve our language and culture - because Deaf schools produce Deaf leaders.

Currently, most of our Deaf leaders in Northern Ireland are aged 35 and over. There is a serious shortage of Deaf leaders and academics under the age of 35, which is deeply concerning.

It is important to note that in the UK, many well-known Deaf leaders - such as CEOs, managers, advocates, headteachers, and teachers - were educated at renowned Deaf schools.

Deafness is not a learning disability. However, historically in Northern Ireland, there has been a deeply ingrained belief that Deaf babies and children must first try an aural approach - and only if that fails, consider sign language.

Unfortunately, this mindset has been instilled in 95% of hearing parents of Deaf children by medical professionals in Northern Ireland. As a result, sign language is often treated as a last resort. This thinking has led to Jordanstown School, the only school for the Deaf in Northern Ireland - being unfairly seen as a "last stop" or rehabilitation centre. Jordanstown School has always accepted many troubled Deaf children, often at ages 8 or 9, or even 13-14. The school has played a vital role in providing a safe space and life skills for these children before they transition into adulthood.

For a deeper understanding of the importance of Deaf peers and Deaf culture, I highly recommend the book Finding Zoe:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Finding-Zoe-Womans-Identity-Adoption/dp/1940363225>

It's a beautiful, thoughtful book that every parent of a Deaf child—and anyone with an interest in the Deaf community – it is a should read.

Understandably, many in the Northern Ireland Deaf community want to save Jordanstown School, as it is an important part of Deaf history. However, the challenge today is that declining enrolment has resulted in Deaf and blind students being taught together in the same classrooms. Teachers now must use their voices for blind students, while also trying to accommodate Deaf students. It's extremely difficult for Deaf children to thrive and become truly bilingual in this kind of environment.

We need something better. We need new bilingual schools and a fresh start. The next generation of Deaf children—and the wider Deaf community in Northern Ireland—deserve nothing less.

The Warnock Report may have been beneficial for some children with disabilities, as it prompted a shift toward mainstream education. However, the report has caused serious harm to the Deaf community and Deaf education. It led to the closure of many Deaf schools and Deaf units across the UK.

Our needs are different from those of individuals with other types of disabilities. The education system in Northern Ireland must reflect this unique identity.

### 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?

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No comments

### Clause 4

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

I believe a steering group/advisory board composed of Deaf individuals and CODAs should be established, and that group/board should be given the authority to list the public bodies and education establishments etc.

This responsibility should not lie solely with the Department for Communities.

Membership of the steering group/advisory board should be reviewed every three to five years to ensure continued relevance and representation.

### Clause 5

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

I believe that the steering group/advisory board, composed of Deaf individuals and CODAs as mentioned earlier, should also be the group that the Department for Communities consults when devising or revising guidance.

The membership of this steering group should be reviewed every three to five years, possibly through an election process.

A well-selected and established steering group would be far more effective than consulting just one individual or group.

I agree that each of the prescribed organisations should also be consulted when devising or revising guidance.

## Clause 6

Do you support the approach taken in this clause?

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No Comments

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

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

No comments

## Clause 7

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

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No comments

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

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

No comments

## Clause 8

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

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information:

No comments

## Clause 9

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

Yes



However, the situation is very different for CODAs. Even though they are hearing and can hear, they are 'culturally Deaf at heart,' particularly if they grew up with Deaf parents who rely on BSL/ISL as their primary means of communication and embrace it as their language of need or value.

From my experience, some CODAs are more 'Deaf' than some deaf people themselves. Often, they grow up in a sign language-rich environment and develop a deep appreciation for Deaf culture and its attributes.

One person once said, 'You need to face certain barriers to be labelled Deaf.' I do agree with that, but at the same time, many CODAs have a strong understanding and empathy for what it is like to be Deaf, and therefore, they are valuable allies.

■■■■ DODA (Deaf of Deaf Adults), ■■■■ have some understanding of what it's like to be a CODA. There are overlaps between CODAs and DODAs, but there are also significant differences. It's important to recognise that each CODA and DODA experience is unique.

Both DODAs and CODAs are invaluable allies within the Deaf community. These groups are often passionate about improving the lives of Deaf people and frequently play a key role in advocating on behalf of 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:

Yes, I wholeheartedly agree that Deafblind people should have access to information, services, education, and more in BSL and ISL - delivered through common tactile or non-visual forms of the language.

Deafblind individuals face double barriers compared to Deaf people, and even more so if they are not bilingual or lack written English skills.

Their voices and feedback on the BSL/ISL Bill must be heard and fully considered by the committee.

Some Deafblind people I know are truly inspirational—remarkably resilient and a great source of encouragement to the wider Deaf community. My life has been enriched by knowing them.

This group of people must be treated with dignity and compassion.

## Clause 13

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

Not Answered

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:

No comments

## Any other comments

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

Not Answered

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

**\*\*An Extra Clause on Bilingual Education\*\***

Deaf education falls within the framework established following the consultation in 2016.

Given this, there needs to be a very clear explanation from DFC as to why they ignored the feedback from the Deaf community in 2016 regarding Bilingual Education and Deaf education.

I am extremely disappointed that there is no clause on Bilingual Education.

When it comes to building a healthy educational infrastructure for Deaf children, people tend to shy away from that responsibility, perhaps because there

is no 'perfect answer.'

I fully appreciate that. However, I personally believe this should be the foremost clause we address, as education is the foundation of society—and in our case, the foundation of the Deaf community.

With a feasibility study based on evidence from other countries, we can determine what would work best for our country.

High-quality education starting from ages 0–4 would help to resolve many issues currently affecting the Deaf community, including the widespread problem and consequences of language deprivation.

I think it's helpful to share that, when I was a child, there were over 30 PHUs and a Deaf school -Jordanstown School in Northern Ireland, which offered many opportunities for socialisation, peer engagement, and, in some cases, high-quality education.

However, today there is only Jordanstown School, a Deaf Unit at Creagh Primary School, and a Deaf Unit at Glengormley High School. With the decline in Deaf leadership—which is crucial to sustaining our community and preserving our language and culture—we must urgently address and provide both short-term and long-term solutions in the area of Bilingual Education.

Long-term solutions will ultimately help the government save money.

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#### **\*\*Bilingual Education\*\***

I would like to give my response regarding Bilingual Education in my native and heart language—BSL.

Please watch the BSL video or read the transcript provided.

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#### **\*\*Establishment of a Deaf Studies Department Led by Deaf and CODA Academics\*\***

Currently, the MA BSL/ISL Interpreting course at Queen's University is led by hearing individuals, and the course is delivered through spoken English, even though some of them can sign.

As a result, Deaf students must learn via interpreters, which is disempowering and unfair. Hearing students, in turn, miss out on opportunities to be immersed in Deaf culture and to learn in the Deaf way.

[REDACTED] I completed my course in England, where I learned alongside other Deaf translators and hearing interpreters in the same class. The teacher was hearing and signed and Deaf guest speakers were regularly invited. The course was delivered entirely in BSL. It was an enriching & uplifting experience for me as a Deaf person.

From my understanding, other universities in the UK have a more balanced approach, with a healthy ratio of Deaf and CODA lecturers in their Deaf Studies departments.

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To be continued below :-

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

Text box to enter additional details:

#### **\*\*Training Opportunities for BSL Tutors and Teachers\*\***

[REDACTED] It is an incredibly important and honourable profession.

I believe there is a great need for more training courses led by Deaf BSL teachers and trainers, who can teach Deaf people how to instruct others in BSL as a second language using the correct teaching methodologies.

Deaf World has fantastic online resources, but face-to-face training is also essential.

For more information, please look up the British Sign Language Training Agency (BSLTA), established in 1985 through a collaboration between the British Deaf Association and Durham University. Under the leadership of Clark Denmark, BSLTA pioneered Deaf-led training and awarded official qualifications for teaching sign language—the first of its kind in the UK.

The agency operated within Durham University's Deaf Studies Research Unit and developed the Durham University British Sign Language Teacher Training Course (BSLTA). This was the first university-based course taught by Deaf individuals and grounded in sign linguistics and second language teaching principles. Unfortunately, the course ended in 1999 when the Deaf Studies Research Unit closed.

The years 1985–1999 were a golden era for the Deaf community. The course led by Clark Denmark and the late Frances Elton trained countless Deaf tutors and teachers across the UK.

Clark Denmark is still alive, and I know he would be delighted to share his expertise with Deaf BSL tutors and teachers in Northern Ireland, if invited.

I would like to take this opportunity once again to reinforce that language-rich schools will produce leaders and academics who can teach the next generation of Deaf BSL teachers and tutors.

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#### **\*\*Funding for Deaf Athletes – Deaf Olympics\*\***

Sport brings numerous physical, social, and mental health benefits.

The Deaflympics has existed longer than the Paralympics, yet over the years, Deaf athletes in the UK have had to self-fund their training, equipment, and attendance—causing a great deal of unnecessary stress.

The UK Government must recognise and support the Deaflympics on par with the Olympics and Paralympics. Other countries, such as Russia, fund their Deaf athletes to attend the Deaflympics, covering training, equipment, and travel.

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#### **\*\*Trained Deaf Carers\*\***

In mainland England, there are many Deaf carers who support vulnerable Deaf individuals—such as the elderly and Deafblind - by visiting and accompanying them. There are no trained Deaf carers in Northern Ireland, and this urgently needs to be addressed.

#### **\*\*Youth Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People\*\***

##### **\*\*Interpreting Vouchers\*\***

##### **\*\*Interpreting Budget for Church Services\*\***

##### **\*\*Provision for Deaf Immigrants\*\***

##### **\*\*Support for CODAs\*\***

##### **\*\*Sign language classes for hearing children in schools\*\***

I will email you a Word document with the full details on the above titles.