

Response ID ANON-PYJC-FRT9-U

Submitted to Sign Language Bill - Call for Evidence
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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 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:

It is right that BSL and ISL to be recognised independently under the languages umbrella whilst preserving disability and equality legislation. It makes it clear that BSL and ISL is a distinct cultural minority group where access to information in the first language of a deaf person is paramount and this is recognised whereas disability and equality legislation does not make this clear and the reasonable adjustment concept does not fully recognise access in first language and allows for alternative methods to provide this information like plain English written English or captions which for some deaf people will still not be able to understand.

In 2013, a review of the roadmap was carried out commissioned by DCAL and one of the findings was that to see real change that legislation was required to facilitate change from the top down as well and from the bottom up. Strikingly some Government departments admitted that to see real change and enforcement to make this happen then specific legislation was required.

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:

In 2010, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) commissioned the 'Consultation Report on the SLPG Strategic Direction' Report through the SLPG. This report included a ten-year 'Roadmap' which outlined the steps necessary to build the infrastructure of support for ISL and BSL users and their families.

The report highlighted three themes that needed to be addressed:

Care and Protection

Creating priorities to recognise and protect the cultural and linguistic rights of ISL and BSL users

Prevention

Creating priorities that ensure future generations of deaf children and young people reach adulthood with the best chance of securing full social inclusion.

Correction (Putting things right)

Creating priorities that increase social inclusion for the current generation of Deaf people who have left education with little academic qualifications, reduced access to training and little prospect of gaining employment or progressing in their careers by providing access to ongoing personal and social development programmes to build their knowledge and skills in their primary language, creating confidence and self esteem to participate fully in their society.

This consultation report involving all government departments, deaf organisations, deaf professionals and sensory support teams concluded that the best Government department to lead this was DCAL (now DfC) because they were responsible for language and culture.

To date the DfC continues to be the right fit and be the lead department to support others. They have demonstrated over the years their complete understanding of the cultural and linguistic needs and the infrastructure needed to carry out their duty to promote use and understanding of BSL and ISL. They have acquired knowledge and understanding and shown regular engagement with the BSL and ISL community

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:

When a child is diagnosed as deaf, there needs to be an unbiased approach in providing parents of newly diagnosed deaf babies information on all options including using sign language. To make it mandatory that audiology professionals and doctors provide an unbiased and neutral positions and allow parents to make informed choices about the benefits of using sign language alongside speech to allow the child to acquire language development immediately.

At the moment there is a strong influential support towards the oral method and many professional advising parents to focus on speech rather than sign language. This is a detriment to the child who will lose the first few years of acquiring language thus impeding on their development before attending school.

Assistance in raising the profile of BSL and ISL during annual sign language week, international day of sign languages.

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:

For the moment it seems reasonable for the focus to be on prescribed organisations to make their information and services accessible. Once the legislation is implemented, and over time it will become an example of good practice that will influence businesses in the private and charities in the charitable sectors.

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 earlier mentioned, during the Roadmap consultation, the Department of Communities was endorsed by the majority of stakeholders in that consultation to be the lead department to support other public bodies to carry out their duties within this legislation.

Department of Communities have developed the necessary knowledge and information about the deaf community and already have established networks within the deaf community to effectively carry out the support role to other public bodies.

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:

This is the co- design approach and this will work effectively. It will enable Department of Communities to keep abreast of developments and already have the networks to ensure guidance remain relevant and up to date.

The Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG) will provide the forum that ensures that departments deaf organisations representatives and deaf individuals ensuring across the board representation enabling guidance to be developed that is endorse by all on the SLPG.

The advantage here is that the SLPG is already established and there are representatives from each department who can attend. Over the last few years, these department representatives have developed knowledge, understanding about BSL and ISL and had the opportunity to get to know deaf organisations representatives and deaf individuals so that this will not come to a surprise when the bill becomes an Act. Departments will be able to have a go to contact to get further information to support them.

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:

The Department of Communities have the knowledge, experience and networks to carry out this function. They have been doing this since 2010 and have 15 years of knowledge, experience and networks in the deaf community. They are best placed to provide guidance and play a supportive role is supporting other Departments.

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:

The Department of Communities already have the knowledge experience and networks to undertake this role and develop regulations if required to put before the Assembly for scrutiny.

There is already provision that Department of Communities must consult with departments and deaf community before creating such regulations.

There has been suggestion that Department of Communities will have Henry VIII powers and some have shared concerns about this. I believe with other clauses, there are safeguards with cross checks to ensure that Department of Communities do not exceed their powers. As advised earlier in the Roadmap consultation DCAL were deemed to be the lead organisation supported by stakeholders. There is a report that explains this in full detail. So naturally if a department has a lead role, it needs to have some powers in order to take this leadership role to enable BSL and ISL users are supported.

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:

Consultation with stakeholders is essential to ensure information is up to date, relevant and fit for purpose. We are in a rapidly changing world through technology, artificial intelligence, visible media, and continuous consulting is necessary.

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:

Department of Communities have the knowledge, experience and networks to carry out this function. They have set up the Sign Language Partnership group and have demonstrated over the years their consultative nature in ensuring everyone who is impacted have had the opportunity to be heard.

In order to draft regulations in relation to BSL and ISL, a department needs to have knowledge and understanding of the BSL and ISL community, the issues to date and likely solutions to overcome barriers. Department of Communities have 15 years worth of this knowledge and understanding so they are best placed to develop regulations to put to consultation and before the assembly and answer questions under scrutiny. They also have the networks within the Deaf Community to call upon to ensure regulations are fit for purpose.

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:

With any new legislation, there needs to be a bedding down period for acquiring knowledge, understanding and to support departments and prescribed organisations to comply. Five years initially is very reasonable to allow departments to develop capacity to enable them to comply with legislation. It would be reasonable to reduce this to every three years thereafter.

Another thought would be to follow the comprehensive spending review cycle within Stormont. The evaluation report could be produced in the final year of any comprehensive spending review cycle to ensure budgets can be created for the next comprehensive spending review cycle.

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:

For BSL and ISL Teachers, there is no such registration body for qualified BSL and ISL teachers. There is a membership body but they do not regulate if teachers have the necessary teaching qualifications.

Currently the options for BSL and ISL teachers to be registered could be with the NI Teaching council under the tutor category. Further consideration should be to consider if NRCPD could expand their remit to include sign language teachers in the register under a new category of communication professional (sign language teachers)

I believe Department of Communities has the network to explore this with NRCPD or NI Teaching Council.

I believe the Department of Communities can support BSL and ISL teacher training courses to gain the necessary qualification to be able to register. Qualification levels required will require consultation.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details:

Currently there is a registration body for BSL and ISL interpreters. The National Register for Professionals working with Deaf People (NRCPD) is the body where interpreters are required to be registered. This has been around for some time and is the recognised place where the public can check if

interpreters are registered and have the sufficient qualifications to practice. The Department of Communities should continue to recognise that the NRCPD is the body where interpreters can be regulated.

I would encourage the creation of interpreter courses in order to increase capacity for interpreters. If that is considered a scheme then yes.

I would not encourage the formation of a stand alone registration body for Northern Ireland interpreters instead of NRCPD. It would take too long to establish one, it will create confusion among the public, and there is a danger that another body will accept lower standards in qualifications. We must maintain the high standards of sign language interpreters.

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:

This definition has been carefully considered for a while now and it is inclusive by nature to focus on the use of BSL and ISL rather than by individual medical ability to hear and talk. The definition underpins the language of BSL and ISL and not the medical model.

There needs to be consideration for a deaf person who was brought up using the oral method and were not allowed to sign. If the deaf person make a decision to learn BSL and ISL in order to be a part of the deaf community, then there should be recognition and provision to enable them to transition and that should be supported.

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 think the definition demonstrates an inclusive approach to BSL and ISL.

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 every reliance is appropriate. This is sufficient.

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:

The clauses have been carefully considered that looks at access, capacity building for teachers, capacity building for interpreters which are the key pillars that would ensure supply and demand.

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

Text box to enter additional details:

The answers provided were based on [REDACTED] the Roadmap. Later a further consultation with stakeholders on the RoadMap review which concluded that in order to see change legislation was required. 10 years later we have arrived at that point and this is an encouraging development.