

Hi,

Great to speak on the phone just now and thank you again for getting in touch and inviting us to provide evidence on the Sign Language Bill.

As mentioned, we welcome the introduction of the Sign Language Bill which seeks to recognise and promote both British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL), placing duties on organisations to ensure their services and information are accessible to those who use BSL and ISL.

There is rich diversity in deafness, with some deaf people using sign language, some using spoken language and some using both. What is vital is that all deaf children, whether their families wish to use sign language, spoken language, or both, have access to early, effective support to develop language and communication in the critical first few years of their lives. For families who want their deaf child to learn to listen and talk, Auditory Verbal therapy is effective for developing optimal listening and spoken language for young deaf children, with national and international evidence showing around 80% of deaf children who spent two or more years on an Auditory Verbal therapy programme achieve age-appropriate language skills. And the majority are attaining educational outcomes on a par with hearing children.

As well as making services and information accessible, which is of vital importance, it is essential that families have equitable access, through publicly funded services, to the early support they need to develop language and communication for their child. This is crucial to reducing the lifetime of disadvantage that deaf children currently face and transforming outcomes.

I hope this is helpful and do let me know if I can provide anything else to members – we're always happy to support where we can.