



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Sign Language Bill – Call for Evidence Citizen Space Survey Word
Version

Overview

The Sign Language Bill provides for:

- Official and equal recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) as languages of Northern Ireland.
- A statutory duty on prescribed public organisations to take reasonable steps to make their services and the information they provide as accessible to individuals in the deaf community as they are to individuals who are not in the deaf community.
- A commitment to promoting the use and understanding of sign languages, including greater access to sign language education for deaf children and their families.
- A framework for accrediting sign language interpreters and teachers, ensuring professional standards and capacity building within the sector.

Why your views matter:

- As part of the Assembly's legislative processes, the Sign Language Bill has been referred to the Assembly's Committee for Communities so that the Committee may consider and take evidence on the Bill and report its opinion to the Assembly.



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- The Committee is seeking views from stakeholders on the objectives, proposals and potential consequences of the Bill.
- Your views will help to inform the Committee's consideration of the Bill and any recommendations it may suggest as it moves to the next stage of the legislative process.

How to respond:

- You do not have to complete the whole survey and can choose which sections to complete.
- You can use this platform to respond with written text.
- If you wish to respond using either BSL or ISL please click [here](#) to visit the Committee for Communities website for details on how to submit your views in sign language.

Terminology used:

We note that some people prefer the use of the upper case 'D' when referring to the d/Deaf community to reflect its status as a cultural and linguistic group. In the Bill the lower case 'd' is used for deaf as a matter of ordinary language in the legislative context and for this reason we use this term throughout the survey.



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Survey Questions:

Consent and introduction

What is your name?

Name: [REDACTED]

What is your email address?

Email: [REDACTED]

What is your organisation?

Organisation: Foyle Deaf Association

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

You can read the Northern Ireland Assembly's privacy notice at this link.

[Privacy Notice](#)

Please select only one item

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?



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(Required)

Please select only one item

Yes, publish in full.

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

Clause 1

Clause 1 formally recognises BSL and ISL equally as languages of Northern Ireland, whilst preserving the architecture of existing disability and equality legislation.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details

Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Northern Ireland must be recognised and supported as a full and equal language — not as an afterthought, but as a vital part of our linguistic and cultural heritage. Equality for ISL cannot be achieved through piecemeal, remedial measures; it demands proactive commitment and investment.

This means ensuring that communication support and high-quality teaching resources for ISL match those provided for any other official language in the



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region. For too long, ISL users have faced slow, inadequate progress toward genuine equality. It is time to act decisively, ensuring ISL enjoys the status, respect, and resources it rightfully deserves.

Clause 2

Clause 2 places a duty on the Department for Communities to promote:

- the greater use and understanding of BSL and ISL (including an obligation to provide for the availability of classes BSL and ISL for deaf children, their close families, guardians and carers);
- the general entitlement of individuals in the deaf community to use BSL or ISL; and,
- the further development of deaf culture by the deaf community through the use of BSL and ISL.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information



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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?

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details

Deaf culture is a unique and valuable part of the Deaf community life which exists within mainstream society. It should be celebrated and showcased not only within Deaf spaces but also as an integral part of mainstream cultural events. Strong links with performing arts organisers, other event organisers and disability officers in local government should be a standard requirement to ensure Deaf culture is meaningfully included in cultural programming.

Currently, there is a lack of targeted publicity reaching the Deaf community about interpreted mainstream arts and cultural productions. This gap could be addressed by creating a central, accessible hub for information, enabling everyone to easily find out what's on.

Promoting Deaf culture — and educating local government and the wider public about its richness — is essential to dispel myths, celebrate its vibrancy, and foster genuine understanding and respect for Deaf people.



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The folklore, experiences, and knowledge of older Deaf people are a vital part of cultural heritage and must be preserved and passed down through generations. Older Deaf individuals should have access to cultural events that reflect their interests and meet their needs — not just occasional fragments of programming designed primarily for younger audiences. Ensuring meaningful inclusion will help maintain intergenerational connections and honour the contributions of older members of the Deaf community.

Clause 3

Clause 3 places a duty on prescribed organisations to take reasonable steps to:

- ensure the information and services provided by them are as accessible to members of the deaf community as they are to the people who are not in the deaf community, at no extra cost to them; and,
- offer or facilitate the use of BSL or ISL for the benefit of individuals in the deaf community in accessing information and services provided by the organisation.

In considering what is reasonable, prescribed organisations may take account of cost and practicability.

Further details are available in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum included with the Bill which you can read here:

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2022-2027-mandate/primary-legislation-bills-22-27-mandate/sign-language-bill/>



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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

Members of the Deaf community need information presented in a linguistically and culturally appropriate format as a priority. Having local Deaf translators deliver this is essential, as it reduces misunderstandings and ensures a single, comprehensive rendition that can be easily and confidently shared within the wider Deaf community.

Clause 4

Clause 4 provides for the Department for Communities to list the public bodies (known as the prescribed organisations) that are subject to the duties in Clause 3.

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4?

Please select only one item

Yes

No



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Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

The list of prescribed organisations should be made available in both ISL and BSL, with the duties presented in clear summary form. This information must be shared with the entire Deaf community in Northern Ireland and placed in one directory to avoid confusion or difficulty.

Clause 5

Clause 5 states that the Department for Communities must issue guidance about the effects of the provisions in the Bill relating to BSL and ISL and the interests of the deaf community. This clause states that, when devising or revising guidance the Department for Communities must consult:

- each of the prescribed organisations; and,
- at least one person or group appearing to the Department to be acting on behalf of the deaf community.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No



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Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

Guidance, along with the impact of the provisions in the bill or any subsequent revisions, must be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure they remain appropriate and fit for purpose. The establishment of a Deaf focus group would be a useful resource for DfC to tap into.

Clause 6

Clause 6 states that the Department for Communities guidance should include best practice advice on the implications of the recognition of BSL and ISL in the Bill for public bodies, including prescribed organisations. This would include:

- what may or must be viewed as amounting to reasonable steps to be taken by prescribed organisations;
- how prescribed organisations should develop plans to be called sign language action plans; and,
- advice on best practice for interacting with people who rely for communication on BSL or ISL.

Do you support the approach taken in this clause?

Please select only one item



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Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details

This clause must be developed in consultation with representatives from the Deaf community, ensuring the voices of all age groups — from children to older people — are heard. Particular attention should be given to the North West and West, which have long suffered from chronic oversight and neglect.

Clause 7



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Clause 7 makes provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations (some time in the future) for the purposes of the Bill.

- The Department for Communities will have the power to create new regulations to support the Sign Language Bill. These regulations are a different form of law, with working detail and may cover things like how public services provide sign language access and how organisations support sign language users. These future regulations would also need to come before the Assembly for scrutiny and agreement before they come into effect.
- The Department for Communities must consult with the deaf community and relevant organisations before making changes. It can assign responsibilities to public bodies, charities, or groups working with the deaf community.
- If needed, the Department for Communities can limit or adjust requirements for certain organisations based on their resources. Any changes must be approved by the Assembly before they become law.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information



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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details

Clause 8

Clause 8 states that, before laying a draft of such regulations, the Department for Communities must consult everyone on whom the regulations confer functions, and at least one person or group appearing to the Department to be acting on behalf of the deaf community. Such regulations need to be laid before and approved by the Assembly.

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



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Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

Clause 9

Clause 9 would require the Department for Communities to prepare a report evaluating the impact of the Bill within five years of the Bill's commencement and every five years thereafter.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No



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Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

The proposed five-year time-frame for evaluation appears excessive. As the impact of new legislation cannot be fully understood until it is implemented, a shorter initial evaluation period would be more appropriate. An annual review for the first two years, followed by gradually extending the intervals, would provide a more effective and responsive approach.

Clause 10

Clause 10 provides that the Department for Communities must make a scheme for, or connected to, the accreditation of (either or both) teachers of BSL or ISL, and/or interpreters of BSL or ISL.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box for entering additional information

Some work has already begun to address this clause. Deaf teachers should be fully qualified and held to the same professional and regulatory standards as interpreters and that of mainstream teachers in schools and colleges. A dedicated regulatory body should be established to oversee quality standards and professional conduct. In addition, a clear complaints procedure — supported by an independent complaints body — is essential to prevent or address malpractice.



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Any teachers of sign language should be indigenous members of the Deaf community. Non-Deaf teachers cannot fully convey Deaf culture, which is vital to ensure communication is appropriate and to prevent misunderstandings or unintentional offense between the Deaf and hearing communities.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details

Clause 11

Clause 11 defines, for the purposes of the Bill, the deaf community as all people falling within one or more of the following categories:

- (a) individuals who rely for communication on BSL or ISL;
- (b) deaf or deafblind people who normally use BSL or ISL for communication (including people who can obtain some or better levels of hearing when assisted by auditory devices); or



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(c) children of deaf or deafblind people who habitually or occasionally use BSL or ISL for communication (including children who have some or full hearing).

Clause 11 also provides that people who (whether or not they have some or full hearing) have little or no understanding of spoken or written language in English but are able to communicate effectively in BSL or ISL, are to be regarded as if members of the deaf community for the purposes of the Bill.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

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

Clause 12

Clause 12 defines, for the purposes of the Bill, BSL or ISL as either or both of the visual form of the Language as commonly used and understood by deaf people, and the common tactile or non-visual forms of the Language as used and understood by some deafblind people.



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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

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

Clause 13

Clause 13 defines, for the purposes of the Bill, everyday reliance on BSL or ISL as relying (wholly or substantially) on BSL or ISL by necessity or for convenience in the course of everyday activities.

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No



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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

Any other comments

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

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Text box to enter additional details

Access for Deafblind people must be significantly improved.



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

Text box to enter additional details

Deaf education should be carefully reviewed, as the scarcity of Deaf schools is eroding cultural identity. Deaf children leaving mainstream schools often face challenges in connecting with both the Deaf and hearing communities. This lack of belonging can have serious implications for their personal identity and mental health, making targeted support and culturally appropriate guidance essential during this critical transition. Children transitioning into further education or careers require appropriate guidance and support.