

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/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The issue is broader than offering classes. We need widespread deaf awareness within social services, the NHS, the police, and other essential services. These services should know how to communicate with deaf individuals appropriately. Ideally, deaf people should be employed in these roles or serve as mentors or trainers. True accessibility comes from a deep understanding of deafness, led by those with lived experience. Teaching families alone is not enough; deaf people should lead efforts to promote our language and culture.

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/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 3 references increased accessibility within organisations, but it lacks clarity. Services like HMRC and social services must ensure that their information is accessible. At present, I do not receive information in the same way a hearing person does, and this needs to change urgently.

Clause 4

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I support Clause 4 and DfC identifying public bodies. However, the scope should be expanded. Public bodies should be encouraged to employ deaf staff and consult the deaf community directly to ensure that services are truly accessible.

Clause 5

Do you support the approach to consultation required in clause 5? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 5 suggests consulting either one deaf person or a group. While the aim may be to streamline, it is essential that consultations are representative and inclusive of the diverse deaf community.

Clause 6

Do you support the approach taken in this clause? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I support Clause 6. Clear and comprehensive guidance for public bodies is essential. These guidelines should help eliminate daily barriers and promote full inclusion so that deaf people can participate equally in society.

Do you feel there is anything else this Clause should include? YES/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

General guidelines are not enough—specific services like social services, adoption, and fostering require tailored approaches. Social workers must understand what it means to be a deaf child, teenager, or adult. They must also understand our language and culture. Without linguistic understanding, communication and rapport-building are impossible. This is not just a matter of access; failure to provide adequate services can amount to neglect. We need specialist guidance and deaf staff within social services. Deaf parents face additional barriers and discrimination in the adoption and fostering processes. These issues must be addressed through binding guidelines aligned with anti-discrimination laws.

Clause 7

Do you support the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations detailed in clause 7? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Deaf individuals are often rejected from fostering and adoption roles solely because of their deafness. This is discriminatory. The Bill should also consider private services, such as banks, mortgage advisors, and financial consultants. Deaf people should have equal access to these services. Currently, many of us cannot access basic services like mortgage advice because interpreters or VRS are denied. Do private companies understand their responsibilities? There should be a clause that explicitly clarifies the obligations of private businesses.

Do you support the approach to consultation detailed in clause 7? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I agree in principle that DfC should consult the deaf community when amending regulations. These consultations must be meaningful, ongoing, and representative.

Every action DfC undertakes should be based on robust consultation with the deaf community, not tokenism.

Clause 8

Do you feel the level of consultation required in clause 8 is sufficient? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 8 ensures public bodies understand their duties through consultation. This clause is essential to creating lasting, lawful accessibility.

Clause 9

Do you think evaluating the impact of the Bill in a report every five years is an appropriate length of time? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Reporting every five years is important, but more frequent updates would be better. Regular assessments allow us to see progress and identify areas that need more focus.

Clause 10

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

BSL and ISL teachers must be qualified and accredited. Accreditation improves the credibility and quality of sign language education in Northern Ireland.

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I am reluctant for DfC to take responsibility for accreditation, as they currently lack sign language expertise. Any decision-making body should involve deaf experts or organisations like Signature.

Clause 11

Do you agree with the definition of the deaf community provided for in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

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

I agree with all four proposed categories of the deaf community. Category 4 includes individuals who, for medical reasons, do not use spoken language but are fluent signers. These individuals, including non-verbal children, should be fully included in the deaf community.

Clause 12

Do you agree with the definition of BSL and ISL provided for in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

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

I support the definitions provided for sign language, including tactile signing for the deafblind community.

Clause 13

Do you agree with the definition of "everyday reliance" provided in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

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

The concept of "everyday reliance" on sign language is accurate. Deaf people use sign language daily to engage with the world. However, recognising this reliance means workplaces, schools, and public services must provide genuine accessibility. If deaf individuals lack access to their language, it can severely impact their mental health.

Any other comments

Is there anything which you expected the Bill to make provision for which has not been included in the Bill? YES/NO

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I recommend a review of CAMHS, adoption and fostering for deaf parents, and social services more broadly. Additionally, private companies—banks, mortgage and financial advisors, and solicitors—must be held to accessibility standards so that deaf people can make life decisions like anyone else.

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

We must preserve and document our history and culture. Much of our heritage is lost or scattered. A central archive or library dedicated to deaf culture would allow both deaf and hearing people to learn about our community.

I would love to see an academic centre established to research the sociolinguistics of Northern Ireland Sign Language. This should be based at a local university, led and staffed by deaf researchers. The work done by DCAL in London should be replicated here. We need glossaries, academic studies, and books documenting our history, language, and culture. Greater visibility and deaf leadership are key to achieving this.