

Reference number

██████████

What is your name?

██████████████████

What is your email address?

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If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation, please state its name.

██████████

(Required) Please review the Committee privacy notice at this link. Please tick here to confirm you have read the notice.

Yes

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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.

The ISL / BSL Act relates to our language, that we use throughout our lives -in work, within our community, in education - every day, 24/7 in our lives. It is our first language. As such, the act is fantastic for us and our human rights. We must have this Act.

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.

No I don't. I feel what's best is for the deaf community is to have deaf adults, including deaf teachers in education, to be role models for younger people. Teaching young people is important, but so is teaching of adults – indeed, people of all ages

including older people within the community. What's needed is deaf clubs, to bring back the notion of a hub where people can learn sign language and culture, where people come to socialize at events like deaf sports and deaf community events. There is a yearly Northern Ireland Deaf Arts festival that's been very successful. Sign language is central to this, and should be taught by deaf teachers. The MA university course should also have more deaf lecturers to promote sign language.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

There needs to be more classes - for all ages - given by deaf teachers. There also needs to be a greater number of deaf teachers, as well as deaf lecturers teaching sign linguistics and other areas. Classes should be taught at all levels - from basic classes to Level 6, and should be free for all ages to attend. Both Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language classes should be provided at all levels, taught and led by deaf people for both 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/NO

No

Please give details to support your answer.

I don't know what organizations will be on the list, but it does need to be comprehensive; it needs to cover all organizations, including charities and the private sector. Their services must be accessible, rather than just thinking about 'reasonable adjustments'. Provision by organisations must match the needs of deaf people. Sign language interpreters for ISL and BSL need to be provided in a wide range of settings, from driving lessons and tests, to private hospital appointments, and many others including Access to Work. It is really crucial to have this kind of provision.

Clause 4

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

My answer is no - I don't believe the DfC should be in charge of selecting which organisations to consult with, and they do not have the experience with us to do so. They should work with the deaf community in this regard, consulting with the community to see what service providers and charities are suitable, and feeding this back to the community. At present we are not aware which organizations are referred to – they are not in the Bill. So, we need to be aware of the organizations that will be working with the deaf community.

Clause 5

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

My answer is no. I believe that consultation should take place using focus groups – for example, with deaf-blind people, the LGBTQI+ community, deaf people who live in Northern Ireland from countries etc. They should be asked what their access needs are using this group-centred approach within the deaf community I do not agree that one person should represent the entire deaf community in this regard; groups should be consulted with individually (be they deaf people, people with a disability or other subgroups within the deaf community).

Clause 6

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

The DfC will decide an action plan, working with the Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG); this group consists of organizations such as the RNID, BDA and so on. However not all of the organisations currently within SLPG have Deaf LGBT representation. Therefore I do not agree with this approach; consultation should be done with all groups within the community, from all different backgrounds, in a focus group-type approach. It is important to talk directly with the Deaf community in this manner when putting together this kind of action plan.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

There is a reference to 'reasonable steps' which I do not agree with. There needs to be a commitment in relation to this. An action plan needs to provide for accessibility for the Deaf community, rather than being dependent on what is seen as 'reasonable'.

Clause 7

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

I haven't seen any regulations so far, so there's no evidence of what they may be, but the DfC cannot produce these regulations without consulting the deaf community here first. For example, the Titanic Museum provides BSL and ISL access devices, but only in BSL used in England rather than the regional Northern Ireland variant. Similarly ISL is provided but it is the Republic of Ireland variant rather than the Northern Ireland regional variant of ISL. Therefore, these regulations need to undergo intensive consultation and approval by the deaf community, who can then fully understand and approve to them.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Again, I think you need to go outside the prescribed organizations ; there needs to be consultation with the Deaf LGBT community on a focus group approach. I'm thinking also of Deaf artists and the emerging Deaf art scene in Northern Ireland – a focus group is needed to discuss their access needs. If something isn't in the list of prescribed organizations - I'm repeating myself a little bit here – you need to be consulting with the whole Deaf community in that way, with all groupings within the Deaf community.

Clause 8

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Again, as I have previously mentioned, I do not.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

No, I do not. 5 years is too long a period; I would recommend a report published every two years. Evaluation should be goal-oriented, and reports should focus on achieving the result of access, rather than being statistics-heavy, or dwelling on the achievements of hearing people; the goals should relate to whether access is in fact being provided within society.

Clause 10

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

No, I do not agree that the DFC should decide on accrediting courses in this regard. They do not have the expertise to do so. Deaf lecturers and academics already have involvement in accredited courses. I do not believe the DFC should establish courses for this, especially if they end up being staffed by hearing lecturers and staff without the necessary expertise in deaf culture and sign linguistics. Instead, focus and consultation should be with experts and professionals and deaf academics who are already involved in accredited courses.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Again, no, I do not agree that the DfC should establish an accreditation system for BSL and ISL interpreting. The NRCPD and RISLI already exist as forms of accreditation in this regard, so I do not believe the DfC should get involved.

Clause 11

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

No

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

There are four groups of people mentioned in the current definition. I have been considering this, and I do not believe these are all appropriate. The priority should be for deaf and deaf blind people to be defined as members, as they are the ones that require access. CODAs (children of deaf adults), and hearing people who can sign, already have access - given the fact that they are hearing people, and have auditory access. People who cannot speak, but can hear, and use sign language - well, it is

difficult to say; but priority should be given to deaf and deafblind people and their communities.

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.

Yes, I do; it is correct that 'sign language' means ISL and BSL. Each is a language with its own linguistic structure and features of a language, so I agree with this.

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.

Yes I do. In going about our lives, we require access to communication in sign language both in BSL and ISL. Here in Northern Ireland, communication in sign language is key when we access services, whether public or private, in all sectors of life – education, work, and so on.

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.

Yes - the Bill at present feels incomplete, and there are some gaps, in my view. Access to Work needs to be fully available for individuals, including freelancers and the self-employed. Also, there needs to be comprehensive financial support for deaf artists working in both BSL and ISL. There should also be more reference to services.

The Bill at the moment shows us nothing in relation to these, and it feels like these crucial components are missing. Clauses need to be inserted into the Bill in relation to these areas: (1) Access to Work; (2) support for deaf artists; (3) access to different services.

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

MA course.

expectation that it would take place in a full sign language environment, but that wasn't the case. In the end, teaching staff left it open to hearing students whether they wanted to speak or sign (whereas of course deaf students would be signing).

overwhelming, when the modality and languages used in class flip around like this. All the lecturers - or at least, a high number of them - have been hearing. Only a very small number of lecturers, a have been deaf -

This is insufficient, but that's been the situation since the course began up to now. This has been a very disappointing aspect of the MA course. I expected a fully signing class environment, given that everyone aims to become an interpreter.

Also, I've heard some things about how NRCPD, the registration body, will treat. All the students, Deaf and hearing, are doing the same two-year course, doing the same four modules, and studying towards the same qualification. BUT apparently the Deaf students in the class will be 'registered translators' - but the hearing students will become 'registered interpreters'? differential treatment and don't agree with it. All students in the course should become fully registered interpreters / translators, covering both skill sets - rather than seeing 'translation' as something only Deaf people do, and 'interpreting' as for hearing people.