

**Reference number**

██████████

**What is your name?**

██████████████████

**What is your email address?**

██

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

Individual

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Yes

**(Required) Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report? (For signed responses, these will be transcribed into written English before publication)**

Publish in full

**Clause 1**

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

We welcome the inclusion of BSL and ISL in the Act; however, there is insufficient detail for us to provide a comprehensive response. It's important to better understand how the DDA and Sign Language Act protect not only our language, but also our culture and history. Many within the Deaf community have expressed uncertainty about what this legislation truly entails. To ensure meaningful understanding, we require detailed information translated into both BSL and ISL promptly.

**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.**

Promoting sign language and promoting Deaf culture are two distinct objectives. Sign language promotion should be Deaf-led, prioritising Deaf tutors and those who have used sign language since childhood. Cultural promotion, on the other hand, must come from within the community, through initiatives such as community events. The loss of Wilton House has had a significant impact. I was fortunate to grow up during a time of strong Deaf community engagement and role models [REDACTED], attending youth associations and Deaf camps. Today, without a community hub, younger generations are missing out on this vital cultural transmission. Deaf culture and sign language must be led by Deaf people – hearing individuals cannot carry this responsibility.

**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.**

Rebuilding the Deaf community starts with giving Deaf children and their families access to Deaf culture. A dedicated cultural centre would serve as a space for performances, education, and year-round events. Only in such a setting can families and children immerse themselves in Deaf culture and identity. The closure of Wilton House has led to isolation and disconnection, particularly among young people. A new centre would benefit all ages and serve as a hub for storytelling, heritage preservation, and generational connection.

**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.**

The term “reasonable” is too ambiguous. For example, schools might consider a classroom assistant with Level 1 or 2 BSL as reasonable, yet we know that only those with Level 4 or above can truly support Deaf children effectively. We've seen qualified Deaf teachers overlooked for positions while others with lower qualifications are hired. [REDACTED] when denied an interpreter during emergency surgery at a private hospital. [REDACTED] I'm denied Access to Work support due to [REDACTED] employment status. [REDACTED] organisations hiring me must cover interpreting costs, which creates barriers to job opportunities. Access must be expanded to include the self-employed and private sectors such as hospitals and legal services. The Deaf community itself should also be empowered to deliver

outreach and support services. Most importantly, the term “reasonable adjustments” has too often failed us – it’s been a loophole, not a guarantee of access.

#### **Clause 4**

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Covered in response to question 4.

#### **Clause 5**

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

I strongly disagree with the idea of one person representing the entire Deaf community. Expertise varies – one person may specialise in health, another in arts or sports. Effective consultation requires diverse representation from different demographics and areas of interest. Ideally, groups should be flexible and rotate depending on the topic. For example, six council areas could each nominate representatives. Broad engagement ensures a variety of lived experiences are included, creating better-informed outcomes.

#### **Clause 6**

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

It is unacceptable for decisions affecting the Deaf community to be made without our direct involvement. Past consultations, such as the BSO open meetings, were successful because they engaged people across regions. These gatherings allowed real experiences to shape policy. Consulting one person or only Deaf professionals from organisations isn’t enough. We need genuine outreach across demographics with transparent, inclusive engagement.

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Wide, open consultation is key. Meetings must be public, in-person where possible, and truly accessible. We would also like regular updates shared in sign language

maybe through the BBC to keep the community informed. Up to now, the process has felt closed and distant. That must change.

### **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.**

The current legislation is vague. In arts and culture, for instance, translation project. For museums often bring in individuals from outside Northern Ireland who use non-local signs. This undermines our regional language variations. At Queen's University Belfast, the MA in Interpreting is mostly attended by already-qualified students, adding little to the interpreter pool. The lecturers are all hearing, and Deaf students face inadequate support. [REDACTED] training to become a Deaf interpreter, [REDACTED] struggled due to a lack of appropriate academic and language support. The environment is dominated by speech, which is not conducive to learning in a Deaf space. Deaf-led, sign language-rich learning environments - like those at Heriot-Watt, Trinity, or Wolverhampton - offer far more effective models. The current academic approach is alienating to many in our community.

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Already covered in earlier responses.

### **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, we must stress that consulting just one person is unacceptable. Public consultations must involve a broad cross-section of the community throughout the process. Previously, decisions have been made behind closed doors, with no feedback loop. This has led to a bill that doesn't reflect the views of the wider Deaf community.

### **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.**

Five years is far too long for progress reviews. We also need clarity on what metrics will be used. Rather than focusing solely on the number of hearing people learning sign language, we must evaluate the direct impact on Deaf people's quality of life, mental health, education, employment, and social inclusion. Targets should reflect real-world outcomes, not just interpreter and sign language student numbers.

**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.**

I disagree with investing in training courses that lack Deaf leadership. A previous PGCE course funded by DfC led to few Deaf practising tutors and many students felt it lacked quality. By contrast, Deaf-led linguistic courses held in 2011 were empowering and effective. Future courses must be Deaf-led, and designed to genuinely upskill the community – not just provide a qualification.

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

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Already addressed.

**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.**

We already have a valued system in the NRCPD. Creating a separate system in Northern Ireland would risk lowering standards. Past local attempts, such as Deaf Studies in 1999, failed. Trinity's success came from Deaf-hearing collaboration. Any curriculum must be co-developed with the Deaf community.

**Clause 12**

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

No answer

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

Repetition of the point in question.

### **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.**

I support Clause 13 if it ensures real access across all public services – for example, through a fully implemented VRS (video relay service) system. But without further detail, it's hard to fully assess its impact.

### **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**

No

**Please give details to support your answer.**

Many in our community have been deprived of language and quality education, contributing to poor mental health and low employment. We need lifelong learning programmes that are free, accessible, and support re-entry into education and work. There's also an urgent need for Deaf counsellors. Currently, we have only one hearing therapist using BSL – and no gender options. A more culturally sensitive approach is needed to rebuild what was lost through systemic failings.

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

Visual communication is essential to our identity, and all information must be provided in visual, accessible formats that reflect how we understand and process the world.

While it's good that support is being extended to CODAs and non-speaking signers, we must ensure Deaf signers are not left behind. Hearing people using sign language still have access to more information and opportunities. True equality means ensuring the Deaf community has equitable access to knowledge, training, and development.