

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.

████████████████

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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.

Yes, I agree that sign language needs to be recognised. However, I don't fully understand the legal implications and how much protection this recognition provides. For instance, it would be helpful to include more about our culture and history so that we are acknowledged as a distinct people group with specific needs, such as specialist education.

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.

I find this clause quite unclear. Teaching deaf children sign language is crucial, but when discussing culture, I question whether these two elements belong together.

Teaching children language falls under education and early years. Deaf culture should be treated separately. Also, what is meant by "promoting"? Until we see what this entails, including the budget and the promotion plan, I can't fully comment. Deaf culture is naturally promoted when deaf people come together, such as through deaf clubs or deaf education. Within schools, bringing deaf peers together helps them grow in language and identity, promoting deaf culture and ensuring sign language is passed down. It would be wonderful to have Deaf Studies that explore deaf history, culture, linguistics, and arts. Deaf sports also represent a strong cultural component. This clause must recognise that culture cannot be promoted solely by teaching hearing parents and their deaf children. [REDACTED] one or two hours a week is not enough. Families need to be immersed in the deaf community to experience culture and natural sign language usage. We once had this in Northern Ireland with Wilton House, the heart of the Belfast deaf community. Since its closure, we've lost that central space. We used to have various deaf-led sports; now only bowls remain. [REDACTED] these cultural opportunities are not as widespread as before. This clause should clarify what is meant by promoting deaf culture. Deaf youth need role models and immersion in the community to see culture grow and thrive.

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.

Definitely not. [REDACTED] Many deaf and hearing students ask where they can meet the deaf community to improve their skills. Exposure to native signers is essential. Language classes alone do not promote culture. For example, I learned French in school, but that did not expose me to French culture. Culture - its humour, nuances - requires interaction with native users. [REDACTED] Culture is only promoted when deaf people come together. My concern is how any of this will work without clear plans. The foundation of the deaf community is strong education where children learn together, forming identity and language through boarding schools. Unfortunately, we lack a good education system here, so most deaf children are mainstreamed or sent to boarding schools in England. [REDACTED] but most stay due to better opportunities and proper Access to Work (ATW) funding there. Another community pillar is deaf sports, which support well-being and connection. However, those opportunities are shrinking. We also need a deaf centre -a dedicated space to meet and build community. These three pillars - education, sports, and community space - promote our language and culture. Right now, none are in place.

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.

What does "prescribed" mean, and who are the listed prescribed organisations? Were these organisations selected for their accessibility to the deaf community? What are the budget implications? I wonder what real impact this bill will have, since many public services are already fairly accessible. Personally, I face more barriers in the private sector, which this bill does not address. Private service providers like private dentists, healthcare and solicitors often do not offer interpreters - areas where we need the most change. Likewise CAB and charities do not have a budget for access and support should be available for these organisations.

Clause 4

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

I think DFC should consult with the deaf community to determine which organisations should be selected. I'm unsure if DFC fully understands our needs. It would have been better to consult with the community before making these decisions.

Clause 5

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

It's hard to comment on the guidelines without seeing them. I know the BDA and DFC are working together, but without community input, it's difficult to respond. Given the pressures on the public sector, these guidelines could be ignored. There's no robust monitoring plan, so we can't know if they're being followed. Enforcement is needed, but I'm struggling to respond without clarity. It would make sense to consult the deaf community before finalising the guidelines. I also strongly oppose one person or group representing the entire deaf community. We are diverse and must be confident in those representing all our views. It feels inappropriate for a bill to assign representation in this way.

Clause 6

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Again, I feel the deaf community hasn't been consulted about the guidelines. Surely, identifying community needs should precede guideline creation. The guidelines carry no legal consequences, so public bodies aren't obliged to follow them. Even with action plans and recommendations, there's no requirement to implement them. I question how we can ensure consistent adherence. Ultimately, it may rely on goodwill, which is too weak. Many organisations don't even know how to book an interpreter, which they use as an excuse. The lack of legal obligation weakens the entire effort.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

There seems to have been a communication breakdown. The deaf community hasn't been consulted, and that needs to be addressed in the clause. There must be a requirement for consultation and legal consequences for failing to follow regulations.

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.

Clause 7 is vague. From what I understand, secondary legislation will be key, but we don't know what that will look like because there's been no consultation. It would be fantastic to see bilingual education included, as well as private sector obligations. While improvements could come if organisations must follow guidelines, we're concerned that consultation may fall to one person, which is problematic. Including deaf people in government bodies is positive, but it's not mandated. Our needs are diverse - will the guidelines account for all of them? Without legal enforcement, the bill might have limited effect. Given the lack of consultation, I can't fully support it yet.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

How will organisations know what to do to meet our needs, and how will we monitor success? One person or group can't represent the whole community. Monitoring is crucial for feedback and improvement. I don't see how this can happen without clear systems, so I doubt real changes will be implemented.

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.

I disagree for two reasons. First, consultation must be meaningful, not tokenistic, and currently, there's no clear plan. Second, relying on one person or group for consultation is worrying. We need a strong, diverse group for meaningful input. The approach so far is concerning, especially given the oral evidence session examples.

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.

How will reporting work, and what will be monitored? I believe five years is too long - three years would be better for regular review and updates. However, without clear monitoring systems or targets, it's hard to evaluate the reporting process.

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.

████████████████████ would love to have our own qualifications, but it's not currently possible. We lack Deaf Studies and deaf academic leadership. █ a PGCE ██████████ was poorly delivered by a non-signer with no deaf expertise. Similarly, the interpreting course at QUB is hearing-led and problematic. Deaf-focused courses must be led in collaboration with deaf and hearing academics. Institutions like Heriot-Watt, Preston, Wolverhampton, and Trinity College do this successfully. We have no deaf academics here, and one deaf academic who moved ██████████ due to lack of opportunities. We can't accredit courses without the right people.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Possibly in the future, but not now. The MA course began before being mapped, creating issues and the system is now out of sync. If we continue with a rolling course, we won't have enough students, and less linguistically prepared students will be admitted. Only five out of twenty current students will likely become interpreters, as the rest are qualified. Some students are enrolled in two funded courses at once. No ISL interpreters will qualify from this MA, they're already certified. The model lacks quality. We've succeeded by running courses every ten years, allowing students time to become fluent and immersed. This course is less effective, and many students don't attend regularly. A Deaf Studies module could help hearing people understand culture, which is key to becoming good interpreters. There are no deaf teachers in this course. A strong deaf voice is essential, and deaf professionals have global networks that enrich teaching. Sadly, this isn't happening.

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.

The deaf community includes culturally deaf individuals or those drawn to deaf spaces - signers, interpreters, CODAs, and those who attend deaf clubs or events. I question whether hearing people who use sign language as a tool but are not active in deaf spaces belong. Makaton users, for example, are not part of our community. The clause isn't clear on why there's an additional category as opposed to using 'D'. It should focus on those who rely on sign language daily. CODAs are part of our community but are not deaf. Young CODAs sign at home but integrate into hearing society. Their hearing status brings opportunities not available to deaf people. This must be considered in definitions.

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 agree with both. What I'm familiar with for deafblind individuals is hands-on or manual sign language. I wouldn't usually associate "tactile" with this form.

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 agree - we rely on BSL for our daily activities.

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.

We need bilingual education. That has been our long-standing dream: to be educated here to the same standard as our hearing peers. The best deaf schools are those led by deaf staff. Legislation should also support leisure and social activities, which improve well-being. Deaf children need more sporting opportunities- deaf-led, in deaf environments where they can develop identity and compete locally, nationally, and internationally. Access to Work is a major barrier. [REDACTED] but only receive 12–13 hours of support, covering only work interactions. I miss networking and conferences. Friends in England receive full-time interpreter support. Here, private courses (e.g., first aid) require self-funded interpreters. We need capacity building and designated course slots at universities so deaf people can qualify in social work, youth work, teaching, and business. We need real educational pathways for leadership, not just six-week leadership courses, but accredited third-level or further education.

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

The bill focuses heavily on increasing sign language teachers and interpreters. Given the funding for the MA, this seems a departmental priority. However, the funding is disproportionate. Some students are funded for two courses simultaneously. It's unfair when the broader deaf community has unmet needs. There must be a requirement for deaf academic collaboration in these courses. [REDACTED] PGCE was led by someone with no deaf awareness. The MA is run by an interpreter but lacks the outcomes seen at universities with deaf leadership. Interpreters trained elsewhere affirm the importance of deaf input. We need more deaf professional e.g, social workers, youth workers, government officials and civil servants who are all deaf leaders. We need pathways to keep talent in Northern Ireland. Young people leave for better education and jobs elsewhere. Without investment in education, sports, and a new deaf centre like Wilton House, we'll continue to lose our community cohesion. But this must be done in consultation with the deaf community.

Hospitality also needs improvement, deaf people want to enjoy it too, but it's often inaccessible.