

Reference number

██████

What is your name?

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

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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.

I think Clause 1 is an important first step because it finally gives formal recognition to BSL and ISL as languages used in Northern Ireland. As a Deaf person, it feels powerful to see our languages acknowledged in law—it sends a message that our identities and communication are valued.

But at the same time, I don't feel it goes far enough. Recognition is great, but what does it actually change for us day-to-day? Without real commitments—like funding for services in BSL and ISL, or legal obligations for public bodies to provide access—it can feel like just words on paper. What we need is proper support so that BSL and ISL users can fully take part in society, whether it's accessing healthcare, education, or government information.

So while I welcome Clause 1, I see it as just the beginning. There's still a long way to go before we have true equality.

Clause 2

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 2 is definitely a step forward in promoting BSL and ISL and recognising Deaf culture. [REDACTED] I see every day how important it is for our languages to be visible and valued. Promoting BSL and ISL isn't just about raising awareness—it's about creating real, equal access for Deaf people in all areas of life.

But I don't think Clause 2 goes far enough. There's still a lack of understanding about the vital role Deaf interpreters play—not just for Deaf communities, but especially for Deaf people who don't have strong English skills, who are from different countries, who use visual or tactile language, or who simply don't connect well with hearing interpreters. These individuals need Deaf interpreters—not as an add-on, but as essential communication support.

If we're serious about promoting Deaf culture, then we need to invest in developing and supporting the Deaf interpreter profession. That means training, career pathways, and recognition—not just token gestures. It also means involving Deaf people directly in decisions about language access and cultural development.

So while Clause 2 opens the door, there's still a long way to go. Promotion must lead to action—real investment, real inclusion, and a stronger place [REDACTED]

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.

Yes, classes are useful, but they're just one piece of the puzzle. To truly promote the use and understanding of BSL and ISL, we need Deaf-led approaches that centre the lived experiences of Deaf people, not just teaching the language.

[REDACTED] the Access to Justice for the Deaf Community project with the BDA, [REDACTED] how powerful it is when Deaf people lead the work. We understand the barriers, the cultural context, and the importance of language access in a way hearing people often don't. That project wasn't just about BSL—it was about Deaf rights, identity, and equal treatment, especially in legal settings where communication can be life-changing.

What concerns me now is seeing more and more projects being led by hearing people—sometimes with little or no real involvement from Deaf communities. That's

not appropriate. It takes away opportunities from Deaf professionals and risks missing the real purpose behind this work. Sign language promotion should never become something that's done to the Deaf community—it must come from us.

So yes, classes help, but real change comes from Deaf-led education, advocacy, and cultural promotion. We need to shift the power back to the Deaf community, ensure Deaf people are leading at every level, and create space for Deaf interpreters, teachers, and advocates to shape the future of BSL and ISL.

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.

The duty placed on prescribed organisations to make information and services accessible to members of the Deaf community, as introduced in the Sign Language Bill, is certainly a positive step forward in recognising the linguistic and cultural needs of Deaf people.

However, in my view, this duty may not be sufficient on its own to ensure real, long-term access and inclusion.

Strengths:

The requirement for organisations to provide accessible information and services is a much needed recognition of BSL and ISL as legitimate languages that deserve equal access. For example, ensuring that Deaf people have access to public services, legal information, and healthcare is crucial, and this duty should support that goal. It is also encouraging to see the inclusion of sign language in the legislative framework, which helps to elevate its status and visibility in society.

Concerns and Limitations:

That said, while the duty is a step in the right direction, it may fall short in ensuring consistent, comprehensive access across all sectors. Many organisations may still face challenges in effectively implementing this duty, particularly without adequate funding, training, and infrastructure. For example, while a commitment to provide BSL interpreters is important, it should not be limited to just emergency situations—it must be a routine and sustainable provision, especially in everyday interactions such as healthcare appointments, education, and employment.

Furthermore, the implementation of the duty may depend heavily on localised awareness and the commitment of individual organisations. The legislation must ensure clear, enforceable guidelines and accountability mechanisms so that Deaf

Additionally, I feel strongly that leadership in this area must come from Deaf people themselves. While hearing allies can offer support, it is not appropriate for them to take the lead on decisions that directly affect the Deaf community. Deaf people must be at the forefront—driving change, shaping policy, and holding organisations accountable.

Clause 6

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

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.

Yes, I support the provision for the Department for Communities (DfC) to make regulations as outlined in Clause 7—but only if this is done in genuine partnership with a Deaf-led working group, rather than relying solely on input from Deaf organisations.

While some organisations play an important role, there have been ongoing concerns within the community about a lack of trust, transparency, and meaningful engagement from certain Deaf organisations. In some cases, these organisations do not reflect the diversity of the Deaf community or maintain strong, active relationships with grassroots Deaf people. As a result, relying solely on them may lead to decisions that are out of touch with the community's real needs and priorities.

A dedicated working group made up of Deaf professionals and community members, representing a variety of regions, backgrounds, and specialist areas (e.g. education, justice, health, interpreting), would provide a much stronger and more inclusive foundation for regulation-making. This group should be Deaf-led and properly resourced to ensure that those with lived experience are actively shaping the implementation of the Bill.

In short, I support the provision in Clause 7 only if it includes clear structures for Deaf community leadership and ongoing consultation—not just token involvement. The regulations must be shaped by those who are directly impacted, and not controlled or diluted by external interests.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

This question seems to suggest that the responsibility will lie with Deaf organisations, which is slightly better than relying on just one person. Having multiple organisations involved means there are more opinions and different perspectives. However, this is still a concern, as some Deaf organisations do not have a strong or trusted relationship with the wider 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.

I'm not sure—it depends on how many Deaf people are involved. Having just one Deaf person in a consultation is definitely not enough. What's important is having a group of Deaf people with a range of backgrounds, experiences, and skills, so that the consultation truly reflects the diversity of the 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.

No, I do not believe that evaluating the impact of the Bill every five years is appropriate. Based on what I have seen and heard from Deaf professionals in Scotland—where a Sign Language Act has already been implemented—a five-year gap is too long. Many felt that important issues and gaps in implementation were left unaddressed for too long, making it harder to make timely improvements.

A three-year review cycle would be far more effective. It would allow for ongoing monitoring, quicker adjustments, and more responsive policy changes. For example, if there are delays in interpreter provision, lack of BSL/ISL access in education or healthcare, or poor engagement with the Deaf community, these could be identified and addressed sooner under a three-year cycle.

Regular reviews would also keep pressure on public bodies to stay accountable and ensure that the Bill doesn't just sit on paper, but is actively improving access and inclusion in real terms. A five-year delay could risk slowing down progress or overlooking persistent issues.

In summary, I recommend that the review period be changed to every three years, in line with good practice and lessons learned from other parts of the UK.

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 support the creation of a new accreditation scheme for BSL and ISL teachers at this time. Currently, there are not enough resources in place to establish a new system in Northern Ireland. This may be something to consider in the future, but for now, it is far more appropriate to continue using established and trusted bodies such as Signature and NRCPD, which already have robust standards and accountability processes in place.

I have also heard rumours that the Department for Communities is considering involving Queen's University Belfast (QUB) as part of this process. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I must express serious concerns. [REDACTED] significant challenges [REDACTED] the course. [REDACTED] a complete lack of interpreter provision for Deaf students during workshops, [REDACTED] had to advocate strongly [REDACTED] access needs met.

Additionally, none of the students were given opportunities to engage in practical interpreting sessions—something essential for developing interpreting skills. The course has been heavily focused on written theory, with minimal real-world application. This raises serious concerns about how students can be expected to qualify as interpreters when they have had no meaningful practice or exposure to live interpreting scenarios.

Most worryingly, the course is entirely hearing-led, with no Deaf leadership or input. It reflects a hearing-centred approach and privileges, while Deaf students [REDACTED] are left to struggle through the course without the necessary support. [REDACTED] it should not be this difficult.

Given these concerns, I would not support any involvement of QUB or similar institutions in accreditation schemes unless there is clear evidence of meaningful Deaf involvement, leadership, and structural change. Until then, it is safer and more

effective to continue with existing national bodies that are already designed to uphold standards in BSL and ISL teaching and interpreting.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

I'm not entirely sure—it would depend on who is involved in developing and overseeing the accreditation scheme. I would only support such a scheme if it recognises and includes both Deaf and hearing professionals who are fully qualified sign language interpreters and translators. It's essential that any accreditation process is led by those with the appropriate expertise and lived experience, ensuring high standards and genuine representation across the profession.

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.

I do not agree that hearing people who use sign language, or individuals with speech difficulties, should automatically be considered part of the Deaf community.

The Deaf community is a cultural and linguistic minority, defined not just by the use of sign language, but also by shared experiences, values, and identity. While hearing people who sign, such as CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults), or those with speech impairments may have close connections to the community, this does not mean they are part of the Deaf community itself. Being part of the community involves lived experience as a Deaf person, including navigating barriers in society, accessing education and services through sign language, and participating in Deaf culture.

It is important to respect these distinctions to avoid diluting the identity and needs of the Deaf community. Supportive allies are welcome, but they should not claim Deaf identity or speak on behalf of Deaf people—especially in decisions that directly affect the 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.

Yes, as long as it includes Deafblind people as part of the Deaf community and ensures their specific access needs and perspectives are fully represented.

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 with the definition of "everyday reliance" as provided in the Bill. As a Deaf person, I experience constant communication barriers in everyday situations, and it becomes exhausting. Whether it's at the hairdresser, post office, GP surgery, dentist, banks, or even public transport—access is rarely straightforward.

Many of these interactions are spontaneous or informal, yet still essential to daily life. The need for sign language is not limited to formal settings like hospitals or courts; it extends to all aspects of daily living, where Deaf people deserve equal access and dignity.

Recognising "everyday reliance" helps to highlight that BSL and ISL are not optional or occasional, but central to how Deaf people live, connect, and navigate the world around them.

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, there are a few important areas I expected the Bill to cover that have not been included.

Firstly, it would be beneficial if each government department were required to develop Deaf-led projects, rather than having hearing people take the lead. Deaf people should be empowered and supported to lead initiatives that directly affect their community, bringing lived experience and cultural understanding into the decision-making process.

Secondly, it is essential that the Bill includes a requirement to use fully qualified and registered interpreters and translators, especially in high-stakes settings such as government communications, courts, police, and healthcare. Unfortunately, I noticed

