

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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Redact my data

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, absolutely, because, as with any other world language, such as French or Spanish, Deaf people have a language of their own. It is a language because it has its own grammar, rules, syntax and linguistics – as does every other language, so yes!

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.

Re Clause two I have to say my response is both yes and no. Yes, in that I believe that sign language should be taught by teachers who are deaf as they automatically have the cultural elements included in their daily use of the language. As long as

they are grounded in the linguistics of the language and how to teach. However, I said no to this clause as it will be very problematic finding enough Deaf teachers to deliver BSL and ISL. I have several reasons for this point :

1. Not many Deaf people in NI have had the opportunity to achieve a PGCE, [REDACTED] there are very few [REDACTED] with this qualification.
2. Within the school system, a specific PGCE is required, but those [REDACTED] who are Deaf and do have a PGCE have one that entitles [REDACTED] to work with the 16+ age group. No-one here is qualified by PGCE to teach the younger age groups. This could mean that schools do not accept [REDACTED] qualification and compromise by bringing in teachers who are not Deaf themselves, but who have a suitable PGCE and level 6 BSL. As a result of all this, Deaf teachers face a barrier which is built in to the system [REDACTED]
3. [REDACTED] I have observed that, when a family has a child diagnosed as being deaf, they are immediately sent into the technical support world of audiology where aids, such as hearing aids can be fitted. These aids may be of great benefit to a deaf child and that is not my point, but I do want to stress, that at the point of diagnosis, the family should be given the full range of information and possible communication approaches, including sign language. Every family who has a child that is diagnosed as being deaf should immediately be given free sign language training, and this should be available locally to every family, right across NI.

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.

My response to this is no. Sign language learning cannot happen only in the classroom. Students who come to class forget what they have learned between sessions, as with any other language learning. Language learners need to practice the language to reinforce the learning and that is best done by meeting a range of Deaf people, but we don't really have the network of local Deaf clubs that we used to have where students could go and practice.

In NI there used to be one Deaf centre where it was common to just bump into people or have larger events, but the Deaf organisations are so fragmented nowadays and people typically meet in much smaller groups, so there is just not the same opportunity to practice. Those who are just beginning need to be exposed to fluent signers who give them regular opportunities to practice. These opportunities are simply not readily available at present.

Across other areas of the UK, I've noticed a lot of local BSL dictionaries or glossaries being developed that are regionally based. I am so proud of our local dialect, but we have nothing digital that is comprehensive enough for learners. We also have both hearing learners and even deaf people who haven't had access to sign language before and want to start learning. We really need some neutral resources that are not owned by the various Deaf organisations and therefore limited and controlled by them. These resources could be digitally developed and maintained so that language learners of all levels have access, no matter which learning centre they attend.

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.

Clause 3 – my answer to this is no, for various reasons.

Firstly, we don't have enough interpreters in both BSL and ISL in NI, for the maybe 1600 Deaf people using sign language, of which I am one. BSL is very much my first language, and I really do want to communicate in BSL. I can read basic English texts, but for anything complicated, such as, for example, tax information, or the kind of government letters that arrive in brown envelopes, tax, or HMRC etc I'm not confident that I fully understand and there are often details that I'd like to clarify. However, these letters have very few contact details now and many of them have not signed up to the remote interpreting services, such as SignVideo, so I've no way of contacting them. Some of them still use the old relay service, TypeTalk but I don't have that equipment anymore and so there's just no way of making contact. That's why I'm saying that services are still not fully accessible.

Secondly, I recently wanted to chat to my accountant. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I asked my accountant to book an interpreter for the meeting. This was refused, even when I pointed out their obligations to make a reasonable adjustment under Section 75, they still refused to provide and told me it could all get sorted out by email.

It can't be fair or full access when everyone else gets to chat to their accountant, but as a Deaf person, I can't get to chat to mine. These services need to make major improvements in how their services are provided.

Clause 4

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Yes I would agree to this as long as anyone involved is fully neutral. There are a lot of vested interests in many of the organisations but if the individual was not swayed by any of that then I would support this.

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 yes I would agree with this on the condition that there were open consultations and discussions held around the relevant topics and that the representatives truly fed back the content of these discussions

Clause 6

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Yes I would agree that the content of the guidelines and other documentation should be led by Deaf people.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

No, I don't agree with this one. It is really important that public bodies do not assume Deaf people are all the same and want the same type of communication. Some people prefer to use speech and lipreading, some are signers but want a type of signing that relates more to English syntax and structures. Some are fully BSL, and some who want an interpreter also want a relay interpreter, which is a Deaf specialist interpreter who have other skills to offer certain individuals. It's crucial that Deaf people are not expected to all be the same, as that would not fit with anyone in society. Service providers need to find a way of asking people how they choose to communicate. Just as everyone is an individual, so it is with Deaf people who are individuals and have their own ways of communicating.

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.

I have no comments to make

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I have no comments to make

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.

I have no comments to make

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 think 5 years is too long to wait for a review. In the initial phase it needs to be at least every 3 years. After a settling in period it could move to 5 years but not yet. As with any new initiative, there are bound to be initial teething problems and I would prefer there to be a more frequent review process to deal with this and any other matters. When the Act is embedded, the review period could well be lengthened.

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.

Yes, I would be very much in agreement with the DfC idea of having our own accreditation process here for sign language qualifications. I would compare it to the teaching and assessment of spoken Irish in NI. We know our own use of language here and we know how we do things, so this would be preferable by far. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] an awarding body based in England [REDACTED] [REDACTED] They just do not appreciate that our dialect is so strong and it would be

great to have our own system. It is very similar to having a NI accent, it just doesn't always get appreciated or even understood. I'm really in support of this clause.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

This one I can't comment on as it's just not relevant to me

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.

No comment on this one

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.

This is not relevant to me however I would like to say that we should be including the communication requirements of those who are deafblind, such as hands on signing, or reduced visual frame signing.

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.

Part two of this one, any time we are out in public, with a doctor or even in a chemist, there are times when I really want to just ask a question, it may not be complicated, but I'd appreciate a few minutes chat. In those settings, even if people try and write notes, their writing may not be clear, or I may just not quite understand but when you

are in public it's easier to just pretend I'm ok and walk away rather than make a scene.

Obviously, if we had interpreters everywhere, all the time it would be wonderful and make life so much easier, but that's just not possible in the real world, as we really don't have enough interpreters.

For me the solution is clear – if everyone would just put a bit of time and effort into learning some sign language, then everything would be so much easier. We, as Deaf people could have so much more access and contact with services and feel so much more part of everything.

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.

Overall, there are so many gaps that I could identify but I'd like to focus on the key issues and those which occur on a daily basis. Some of them may appear trivial but the impact can be enormous.

For example, taking your car through the MOT process. We, as Deaf people get treated so differently. The process concludes with a decision and feedback on any areas of the car that still need serviced. I've observed this many times and I'm very clear that at the end the people doing the MOT have a chat with car owners at the end and give them that feedback verbally. As I am Deaf, my experience is totally different. As soon as I indicate that I'm Deaf, I get the most basic of gestures and then the paperwork is thrown at me and I'm told to move on. I then have to drive out to have time to read through the paperwork and try and understand the outcome of my MOT – it's just not fair treatment.

Sometimes there are real barriers to communication. This is a topic that I feel very strongly about, and it relates to Early Years Interventions. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Families with young deaf children need to feed their child's language acquisition and learning with a range of resources, such as appropriate nursery rhymes and books. Unfortunately, ADY are the only provider in NI for this age group and there is just too much work that needs done for the children in this age group. [REDACTED]

there are simply not enough BSL teachers available. As I indicated earlier, there are very few [REDACTED] who hold a PGCE, and those who do are not keen on teaching nursery rhymes and children's books, they just want to deliver on the accredited courses. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I would have thought it would be obvious that if we all invest in Early Years Interventions, then we will save a lot of time and money in later years with young people who struggle to be adapted and have problems with their mental health. Many young Deaf people are really frustrated with the lack of effective communication within their family circle and this can lead to conflict and other resultant problems. If young deaf children can develop appropriate language skills in the early years of their life, then they can develop on a par with their peers and also have better communication with their families and wider circles.

Also, I am aware that we have a school that should be providing Deaf education in Jordanstown, but what they deliver is more like an education system for deaf children with additional needs. [REDACTED] I've met many children and young people who have been through the mainstream system in NI. I would never judge parents for these difficult decisions around school placements, they are doing their best for their own child, but what I often see in these children and young people is that they are highly frustrated with the context they are in and the struggles to communicate.

I really believe that we need some kind of school or centre in NI that takes a rigorously academic approach to educating deaf children. If parents don't want their children to travel then maybe there should be two centres, but we need something, along the lines of Mary Hare School, that truly challenges our deaf children yet supports their communication effectively. I do appreciate that the cost of this may be prohibitive but this is my own belief around a current gap.

Fourthly, there are a lot of Deaf organisations in NI but they seem to be very competitive and reluctant to share. I know that competition can be healthy but it would surely be ideal if we had one single centre that shared out services and resources and where everyone could work together effectively.

Finally, I would love there to be a role for one individual, or one body of some kind, that is neutral, to oversee the work of all interpreters, translators and teachers in NI. I know this happens in other areas of the UK and I'd love there to be a single point of contact here where Deaf people who have complaints or issues know they can approach that person to have these things resolved. This really does need to be a neutral body, with no vested interests.

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

I have no comments