

Reference number

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What is your 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?

No

Please give details to support your answer.

What's interesting for me is that when I think back to the consultation that was held in 2016 around a potential BSL ISL act, there were events held all over Northern Ireland, there were presentations given and there was a large turn out by the Deaf community and discussions held. It felt as if we were given a lot of information and we in turn we were able to express our views.

However, now we have this new bill but it seems to me that there are major gaps. For example, the topic of Deaf education is one that was raised many times in 2016 and we all agreed that it needs to be prioritised, but it doesn't appear at all in this bill. The focus of this bill seems to be on access to public services, but everything seems to be very general and a little bit vague. Because there are no examples, no real context and it's not very clear what it means it comes across as very general that leaves us feeling as if it may be quite weak and ineffective, and I think it needs more structure, more detail and to be a lot more clear - that's my opinion.

So in answer to the question do I fully understand what the bill is about - my answer has to be no. Whilst I do appreciate that there were interpreters who translated the clauses of the bill and they did a great job, but I still don't fully understand it even with that because of the lack of context and examples. I've even approached some people that I know who are not deaf and who work in the legal sphere. One of them is a barrister, and I asked for their professional opinion. Both of them said that they felt the bill wasn't very clear either so that's my response to the first question.

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.

In response to the topic of promoting Deaf culture, the current phrasing just looks like words on a page that of themselves have no inherent meaning and so I have said no to this one. I need to discuss Cultural Appropriation. Deaf culture is where Deaf people themselves come together as a community. It is where sign language is used as the main language in events, in a Deaf space, such as a centre or hub used by Deaf people, using sign language. It happens when there are signed performances, art, comedy, poetry, Visual Vernacular and all of them delivered by people who are deaf themselves and have always used and valued sign language. That is what Deaf culture means.

It does NOT mean people learning a bit of sign language then going on to use it and being lauded as having a lovely language. That is cultural appropriation at it's worst. Deaf culture should be events held in such a way that those who are not Deaf will come and watch and see various expressions of BSL and ISL.

A clear example of this would be the fabulous Deaf Arts Festival which has just had it's third run – for three years in a row. Every year has been highly successful and the feedback from those attending has always been that people are amazed at the cultural richness that occurs when a space is owned and occupied by Deaf people. This is the kind of event that promotes Deaf culture yet we always struggle to get funding and often we are operating on a shoestring, which means we have to compromise in what we deliver. There seems to be plenty of money available to fund interpreters for working in mainstream settings, such as interpreting plays and events, but when it comes to Deaf led events such as the Arts Festival, the money is just not forthcoming.

If it were properly funded, the NI Deaf Arts Festival could be such an inspirational event for everyone in NI, showcasing the incredible talent and potential of sign language and what Deaf people have to offer the Arts in 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.

It's much more than just this - sign language is a language you don't learn it by just sitting in a classroom, you need to be exposed to deaf culture and the deaf community. As I said earlier, the NI deaf arts festival is an example of this. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This is what our sign language students need – they need to see deaf culture in action and learn about Deaf history. For example, youth clubs in NI is a fascinating topic, they have been run for so many years and they just did follow a particular approach. As Deaf people, there are types of games that we play when we come together and the students need to see all of this and learn just how we do things when we are together, in our own way.

Drama nowadays does support the idea of diversity access and inclusion but we have our own way of doing this, our own way of organising games, and students should be part of all this as part of their learning.

My vision for the future of sign language learning is that it does not just take place in a vacuum, sitting in an ordinary room with four walls. We need our own Deaf designed space that has resources available, with posters on the walls and a sense of culture brought into the learning environment. For years now our sign language teachers have struggled with all of this and it is time now for a change and to see a much more progressive approach by having a Deaf hub that the students come in to for their learning. There could be a deaf café there too and a library of resources with a research centre and a vibrant collection of and exploration of Deaf culture in general. Also dictionaries collecting BSL and ISL as used in NI.

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.

There needs to be a new system for booking and paying for interpreters were by Deaf people who want to attend perhaps a solicitor's office or a yoga class or an presentation by an artist, can approach the organisers and refer them all to a relevant government source who will fund the interpreter. The current system doesn't

work because there is no money to pay for interpreters and what I don't want to see happening is a system such as that which was set up recently in the South of Ireland whereby they had vouchers given out but the system was never very clear and therefore deaf people didn't really know how to use it and it's all become very messy and out of control. Moreover, we don't have enough interpreters in Northern Ireland so if you add it in a voucher system so that deaf people could access anything in society there just wouldn't be enough interpreters for everything that needs done and some really crucial events, such as work based meetings etc would not be covered as the interpreters would all be booked out.

So, some system whereby organisers can contact a particular government source who can provide interpreters is what we need here. This is really important for deaf people in Northern Ireland to know that they can access anything in society and that there is a system in place - deaf people nowadays want to have work - we know that Universal Credit is being cut back so it is very important for people to not only have a job but to have opportunities for progression and to be able to stay in their work for a long time. Interpreters are crucial for this.

Clause 4

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

I really disagree with the way that DFC has been allocating its funding - it all seems to be done based on personal relationships. A clear example of this would be the funding that has been going to the Northern Ireland Daily news. They have been funding this for over 4 years now and the clips are posted on a Facebook page yet the number of people watching is very low. These clips are recorded at home in people's individual bedrooms with that as a backdrop. I do understand that when we started we were in COVID times and these clips were used to give information on COVID related issues but we are no longer in COVID times now, and actually it's a bit depressing to see people still sitting in their bedroom putting out these bulletins - to me it's a waste of money. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that's a lot of money for what is being produced for a low-quality product.

Across the UK in recent years we have seen a lot of Deaf people starting to record podcasts. They do this by investing in proper equipment, such as lighting and green screens etc, or going out and about and interviewing people in interesting settings - that's the kind of quality we should be aiming for.

My recommendation would be that if someone wants to put together this kind of clip they should have to go through a process whereby they put together a business plan

with interesting ideas, recorded professionally and go through a relevant process before getting funding. This would result in great resources which would be of interest for everyone in Northern Ireland society and also wider afield. The current product is patronising and only being seen by a very limited audience. Good resources would have subtitles and voice over provided too.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Daily news is so repetitive and boring and I just do not understand why DfC have continued to plough money into it for all this time.

I'm also really taken aback by the current MA which is running in QUB. DfC has put enormous amounts of money into that course, and I was shocked to discover that the students are still not even registered with NRCPD. That is the registration body that requires interpreters to have their insurance, CPD etc all covered and oversees professional standards for all interpreters. The students don't even have any registration, yet they are moving into their second year where there is talk of placements but without that registration how can they do this?

QUB run a Sign Language Network programme, which seems to be very well attended by people, but they are not Deaf. Hardly any Deaf people go to it at all, so that is totally inappropriate, it is an abuse of funds to have an event which is ostensibly about sign language and yet does not attract a Deaf audience. So much money is being poured into all this and it is not benefitting Deaf people themselves, even though we, as Deaf people, miss out on so much information on a daily basis. I get very annoyed that people who are interested in deaf people, but are not Deaf themselves, are getting so much money and information given to them.

There would appear to be a tight circle of people around DfC who are in the know and regularly getting money from them. They are doing very well out of this funding and seem to look after each other as they keep getting money. The wider Deaf community have had enough of this and believe that it is just favouritism.

We want to see someone involved who has a real vision for a vibrant Deaf community who will bring massive benefits to the NI economy by attracting tourists from outside NI to come here and spend money in hospitality and local businesses. That is how we can have a return on investment in the Deaf community – by showcasing what we have to offer and attracting others to come here and see it. We could have a media course here. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Funders need to think more strategically, and with a business head on, about how the money they allocate can create a return on investment and build up our local economy, rather than just handing out large sums that are achieving nothing – it's like throwing money down the toilet – it's going nowhere at all.

Clause 5

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

No, there is no way at all I could agree with this idea of one single person to represent the views of the entire Deaf community. Think about it this way... for all of the services that are part of the NI community, would one person even have an understanding of them all? The NI Deaf community is as diverse as any other community. Let me give you some examples. Young people have their own perspective, those who are in regular employment, or those who are currently on benefits, each have a completely different experience of life. Some people are keen on sports, some like to study, some love the arts and each of those groups would have different views. Can you imagine NI having one single politician to represent everyone in NI society – that proposal would cause a riot! There needs to be a process whereby those who have relevant experience and interests can be brought in to consult on specific issues. Whether it's issues to do with education, employment, arts and culture, or living as an older Deaf person in NI, those who actually experience these issues need to be advising, from their own lived knowledge and vision of the future.

There is just no way that one individual could ever hope to represent all of this.

Clause 6

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Reasonable adjustments are not acceptable to the Deaf community. For so many years now we have had to tolerate inadequate services that have left us at the bottom of the pile, with no opportunities for life advancement. We have suffered in silence for long enough. Those of you in government have been lucky that we have done so and enough is enough. Now it is time to see our languages given equal status. No more of this "reasonable" approach. We just want parity of esteem.

When people from other countries move to NI, there is no doubt that a lot is done to ensure they settle well. They get spoken language interpreters on demand and prior to Covid we saw so many examples of this. They've got employment, benefits,

housing, promotion opportunities in work and all on demand. But for us deaf people, staff gesture and ask us if we can lipread and can we write things down and so many excuses.

We are citizens of NI, we pay taxes all our lives, yet we get treated as less than human beings, just because we use sign language and not a spoken language. Enough is enough and it really is time to have ■ rights enshrined in law. It shocks me that QUB and other colleges in NI are bringing in people to teach sign language who have no formal training to do this. No mentoring opportunities are provided, no shadowing and no formal group which oversees the teaching of sign language. Interpreters must be registered with NRCPD, it's a rigorous process that requires 25 hours CPD annually and there are stipulated qualifications required. Sign language teachers have to self fund and sort out their own training. There was one PGCE course and there was lots of interest – 15 Deaf people applied, but from that cohort, there are only 3 teachers still teaching. The selection process was obviously flawed. There should have been a prioritising on that course of experienced teachers, with a minimum of 5 years teaching behind them, not just people who wanted a free course.

We have Deaf people who want to train as translators and interpreters but there is no course for them. Training should lead to secure job opportunities, not just be open to anyone. The teaching of sign language in NI is now being corrupted by hearing people who have, sometimes, got minimal BSL qualifications starting to deliver courses, these should be only taught by Deaf people themselves. There are no clear standards. Clearly they are enjoying it as they are out there promoting their services and earning money when they can barely sign themselves. Courses like baby sign – it's so inappropriate. There are people who have won awards for teaching baby sign and they promote themselves very openly – they are abusing the system, it's all wrong.

PGCE training should be offered to those who have demonstrable skills and experience – Level 6 BSL and some years teaching behind them. Those who are starting their BSL journey should never be teaching the language. Hearing people shouldn't either, it should all be done by Deaf people with experience.

There are deaf people who are working in presenting the BBC news who are not being given the chance to train as translators or interpreters here, even though these are job opportunities for them, this needs to change.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

There is a need for a Consultancy role to be developed for interpreters who work in the creative arts sector. Just because interpreters can sign, doesn't necessarily

mean that they fully appreciate the need for creative expression to be at the core of any onstage work. A Deaf Arts Consultant can work with an interpreter to develop these skills. Audiences who are not Deaf often think that just because an interpreter is using BSL/ISL then they are doing a wonderful job, but I've known many instances where Deaf people in the audience have had a totally different experience than those around them. The emotion and impact can be totally lost. This is an important role that needs to be developed.

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 would need more detail to understand what is meant by these regulations and to understand how they will be compiled. Will they be discussed with the wider Deaf community?

If DfC are going to only consult with the Deaf organisations they just won't get a representative overview of the Deaf community in NI. BDA and NDCS nowadays have very little input from Deaf people themselves. The BDA in particular have become totally controlled by their funders and won't move outside of what suits the funders. They behave like robots and there are no new initiatives, so a lot of us have lost interest in them. I don't see them empowering Deaf leadership and ensuring that Deaf people in NI have better lifestyles and major opportunities. The numbers tell a story, there just aren't many Deaf people here who have really positive mental health, brilliant jobs and incomes and brilliant life stories to share. The BDA just aren't doing much about this and it's a bit of a joke, to be honest. They ran the call for evidence in Stormont recently and only two people turned up.

What we need is a big Deaf Centre or Hub, where there are regular events and gatherings.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

How would you feel if one single person were to represent the whole of NI for everything? We have six counties in NI, why not set up events in each of those counties and ensure there is representation from all the different groups, age groups etc, and gather feedback that way. There needs to be representation from all the various Deaf groups. Imagine one single person deciding everything for NI – would they be Catholic or Protestant, male or female, the list goes on. It's a daft suggestion. We need to think about diversity, inclusion and equality.

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.

MLAs work on the basis of representing their constituency – then they bring those issues into the Assembly for discussion – that’s the model we need to consider. It’s completely inappropriate to even consider that one individual or group could speak on behalf of us all.

I would say that if we can get this process started, we are keen to work on all this together, there are many deaf groups around NI, HTT, FDA, Lurgan Deaf club Newry Deaf club and many others, all waiting for the chance to get working together.

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.

I think that a five-year review time scale is too long for such a new piece of work. Similar Acts in Scotland and Ireland have shown that 5 years is too long as there is so much learning in the early phases of any new development, but little can be changed within the first review period. I would suggest that a 2- or 3-year time period would be better and would allow for learning and adaptations to be made.

I am sure that government runs its budgets in a tighter timescale. Each department is allocated funding and then this needs to be reviewed fairly regularly based on need and other developments.

I think we should remember that job contracts in NI are typically very short term, 6 months to 2 years maximum, whereas other years people are in longer contracts.

This should be the same, for example the current MA in QUB needs to be reviewed to see if it is successful or not. If it is not but everyone is tied to a five year programme, then how does all that get changed without having spent so much money before the review period is up.

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, there is an established accreditation system already for interpreters and translators. They can be assessed via the Signature system and registered with NRCPD, who have already established all of the processes required, such as mentoring, the qualifications themselves and the entire processes are there., including an effective CPD system.

They've got everything set up and we can just liaise with them in delivery. They have Deaf leaders in place and we can work with them.

Moreover, in NI, we have no Deaf academics based here who are university based with a PhD. There have been a few but they have moved on as there were no opportunities to keep them here. It's a dysfunctional place for them to want to work in. We are desperate to learn but we need to keep our ties with NRCPD and Signature and leave it that way.

The gap that we really have in NI is that we need a Centre of Sign Language teaching which is a Centre of Deaf Studies and has all the relevant resources.

There was some work done in the college in 1999 before QUB but it didn't work out and I don't know the detail, but it was clearly all a mess. It's all embarrassing and we do need a proper Deaf Studies Centre here.

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

No

Please give details to support your answer.

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.

This topic really frustrates me – Deaf education is the most important topic to us and always has been. Think about it this way, the levels of Deaf children attaining good GCSEs is really low, but the incidence of mental health problems among deaf children is really high. There are very few deaf students currently sitting in third level education. I would advise bringing in someone independent to carry out a feasibility study on how money for deaf education is being spent.

Just consider Jordanstown School. Many of the teachers there have minimal BSL, only levels 1 or 2, which is very low. They have Deaf people working in the school who have great BSL skills but they are employed as classroom assistants therefore

at a low level of status and income within the school context. How many qualifications do those pupils achieve before they leave Jordanstown School.

There is a peripatetic service of teachers for deaf children in NI – what are the language skills and experience levels of those teachers? What are the success rates of the pupils they visit? So much money is being spent and yet the overall results for deaf children in NI are still very low. Why not run a programme in Jordanstown School to insist that teachers who work there are either qualified to Level 6 in BSL, or Deaf teachers who also have the level 6 qualification and BSL fluency. I am sure standards would raise and then this model could be rolled out across NI. There are people who are not deaf but have grown up in deaf families and have great signing skills, they could be utilised more. Having Deaf adults in the education system ensures that deaf children have positive role models, who will prepare them and increase their expectation for achieving after they leave school.

Colleges and universities also need to have a deaf coordinator who can ensure that deaf students have a smooth journey through the systems there. All of the relevant facilities could be coordinated and support offered to their hearing peers, to encourage them to learn sign language, from beginner levels right up to level 6. This coordinator role is absolutely crucial.

QUB have [REDACTED] language coordinators, [REDACTED]. Neither of them actually understand our processes or structures for running sign language classes. For example, the basic course, called Level one, is run across 3 sections and [REDACTED] planning them alongside the university dates, but that won't work with the way that the level one is structured and needs to be assessed and it just causes chaos as students are expected to continue until July. [REDACTED] bringing in Deaf people to teach who don't have the relevant experience or training and then they get it all messed up too. [REDACTED] deaf coordinator for sign language courses as we all understand the system and what is needed and we can mentor and support new teachers who are brought in. The coordinator could provide progression routes and support and arrange materials too.

Previously there were lots of deaf coordinators in colleges but nowadays it's all done by people who haven't the first idea about sign language and how it is taught and assessed. A class teaching Chinese would not expect someone who doesn't speak Chinese to come in and get it all organised for them, that would be offensive, why can't our language be treated properly too.

[REDACTED] Deaf teachers [REDACTED] are being dominated by hearing people coordinating [REDACTED] classes who can't offer [REDACTED] any support at all. The system is completely flawed and this has to change. Give Deaf people a chance.

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, sign language is a visual language and a silent one too. Imagine an event promoting access and inclusion, no matter how many groups you have represented, the deaf person will still be left out as they are using a visual language. We just have a different way of communicating and of experiencing life. Anywhere that wants to include deaf people must understand that they have to adapt, bring in an interpreter or start to use sign language themselves.

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.

[REDACTED]

People are constantly coming up to me and wanting to engage, until the moment when they realise that I don't use speech, then they go all awkward. It's really tough.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I went down to the bar and so many people approached me but we just couldn't communicate effectively. It really did hit me hard to realise how many opportunities I miss out on in life. The ability to network and make those connections that can lead you further, but they didn't happen for me.

In theory, ATW should have covered an interpreter to be with me there, but, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I have massive problems getting ATW agreed. ATW funds are based on a contract of employment and regular income, but [REDACTED] I simply don't have that security. My work comes and goes so I was turned down for any ATW. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] so that I could get an ATW budget that would enable me to bring in interpreters and do the kind of networking that others would take totally for granted.

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.

It makes perfect sense that teachers of deaf children who are deaf themselves should be working in the school for the deaf, but this has not been happening. I know of several deaf teachers who have applied for jobs but been rejected, this has to be a form of discrimination. These teachers are qualified teachers of the deaf with Level six in BSL and they should be allowed in to teach in Jordanstown School. They will always be positive role models for the children.

It should be obvious that hearing teachers of the deaf should have their BSL Level 6 too.

Colleges and universities should be ensuring that interpreters working for them are highly qualified and suited to work in those settings. Over the years, and still now, I see that there are Trainee interpreters working in those settings. Obviously, this will impact on the students' studies as the trainees are only just developing their skills. Students are assessed on their learning and their learning is bound to be impacted by interpreters who are still only just developing their own skills. Deaf students could put a lot of time and energy into preparing to deliver on a topic, but if the interpreter's production into English does not match, then the students will get marked down. This bad practice must stop.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

My biggest concern is that I know what happens in rest of UK, where Deaf people in these positions have large ATW budgets. Most deaf people in NI have around 4 – 12 hours ATW allocated per week. I am planning multiple collaborations, but I need interpreters for this to happen and without an appropriate ATW budget that won't happen. I believe that this would be an investment in the economy of NI as it would generate more income for Deaf people involved in this sector and that investment needs to be via the ATW system but at present it is simply not available here.

I'm tired of being held back by the system – I just want a budget that will make things happen – watch this space, I'm determined to prove myself right.

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

Over the years, far too much money has been handed out without any clear understanding of the outcomes. The more we ensure that deaf people are given training and support that inspires them and enables them to move forward, the more we will understand where money really needs to be spent.

We are currently look at cutbacks to the UC budget which mean we need to ensure that Deaf people are ready to take on work and move into employment, so opportunities are really needed. They will then become taxpayers and become part of the system, where they will contribute much more, when they see the potential to progress in their careers.

The language will develop as a result. We also need more Deaf people involved in Arts and Media sectors. More employment results in better standards of mental health, reduced isolation, older people empowered, access to education, information, rights and independent living.

It's a common phrase among us that Deaf people are always the last to know, this needs to change so that Deaf people are involved and part of a vibrant and growing culture and community.

Sorting out education for deaf children has to be the key to all of this.

The education system has failed so many of us Deaf people from day one, so university courses should be free to all of us.

Where money is being spent on worthless projects, all of that needs to stop and the money reinvested into ensuring that Deaf people have the right support. Investment needs to go into Deaf teachers, Deaf leaders, setting up a really excellent Deaf hub that becomes a centre for many cultural activities and is a place where sign language is used freely. Developing proper jobs for deaf people is crucial as so many are caught in the benefits trap. Provide access, training opportunities for promotion and full time ATW budgets.