

Reference number

██████████

What is your name?

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What is your email address?

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

N/A

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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 fully support clause one. It is crucial that our language, culture and community have the legal status that this official recognition will bring. The significance of a legal status will be so significant for our BSL community.

We need to ensure that our culture and rich heritage are preserved down through future generations

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 two is so important in terms of both language and culture. It is crucial that as soon as any child is diagnosed as being deaf, that the family are immediately given the training they need in how to use BSL effectively. If the family is given this instruction in both language and cultural implications, then they can support their own child in developing appropriate language skills, so that deaf children grow up acquiring signed language as naturally as other children acquire the spoken language of their family.

This will result in deaf children growing up with a clear sense of identity and acceptance of who they are, rather than struggling with feeling they have to fit into another way of being. The Deaf community will welcome these children and their families in as they grow and in this way, everyone benefits.

These deaf children and their families should also be encouraged to seek out role models, such as those deaf people who are presenting for the BBC News or Deaf BSL teachers. In this way, they will see for themselves that they can live in a bilingual world, where they can operate in both BSL and English, and they can be part of a strong cultural movement.

This is a really important development and needs a lot of development brought in, such as increasing the number of Deaf teachers available to work with these families and teach them BSL. This will lead to a greater presence of BSL in society, on social media, at public events, lectures etc, where those who do not use BSL themselves can see it being used in an effective way.

In society nowadays we have learned to value and appreciate languages coming from other communities, such as Chinese. It is time, now for BSL to be valued and to have a greater profile in public life.

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.

Clause three requires a lot more local infrastructure. We need a bespoke app and website that support the learning of BSL. I'd like to see the establishment of a Deaf centre or hub, this would be a place for the Deaf organisations to come together, for people to meet face to face and to work together on initiatives such as developing a new app.

This would be an ideal place to welcome those families who have a deaf child to go in and practice sign language and experience the language and culture of deaf people for themselves. It could have so many uses, and in particular be a place where the Deaf community can hold events and bring in a range of learning opportunities too.

Learning BSL requires so much more than just sitting watching, it needs an approach such as VRK, Visual, Receptive, Kinetic, and this kind of teaching needs an appropriate setting that is conducive to effective learning. It would need to be equipped with the latest technology and places for people to meet up in person.

Our community needs a place that meets our needs and encourages multiple opportunities for being together.

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.

Clause three. On a daily basis everyone expects to be part of what is going on around them and just pick up on information as they go. In so many work and family situations, we are not kept up with what is going on and it means that we miss out on so much incidental information that others would take for granted. It feels as if everyone else gets to know things before we do, and this is simply unacceptable, in this day and age.

All organisations should take it on themselves to ensure that they are fully accessible. As a community, we suffer daily frustration and upset and in the 21st century it really is time for all this to change.

As citizens, we don't want to be told that all of this is limited by budget. There is money to be spent and we do have rights. Of course, there needs to be some accountability built into all this and expenditure will need to be reviewed, but as we progress, there will be a greater level of understanding around what is needed and appropriate budgets can be put in place.

We do have rights to access everyday life that everyone else just takes for granted.

Clause 4

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause four It is imperative that there is direct representation from Deaf people themselves in putting this together. We need the Deaf community to have ongoing discussions on these topics, and then 2 Deaf people, from those discussions who can represent what has been discussed and engage with DfC in developing all of these plans.

Clause 5

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause five raises an important issue which needs input. Yes, we know the DfC will be working on putting together future plans and will meet with reps from the Deaf community to do this. However, one individual or one single group would not be enough, there would need to be a few and even that needs discussed. Any one who is representing needs to know they have support from their peers.

I would also want there to be annual reviews, not just every 3-5 years. We know that there will be areas of work that need developed and we want to see the positive outcomes so annual reviews will be crucial.

Clause 6

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 6.

It is so important that all of the public bodies have practical guidance on how to develop services for when they encounter Deaf people. I can see the benefits of this type of work, but it must all be kept under review.

There is also the need for these bodies to have training – this work would take years to complete and even then it cannot be stopped as there is always staff turnover. We need a society where Deaf people have reduced frustration and isolation because staff provide a much more appropriate level of service, but this will require ongoing training.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

In relation to my previous comments, I want to add that it will be crucial to engage a Deaf teacher who can deliver sign language training, Deaf Awareness training, training for staff on how to approach Deaf people. Those who are involved in these developments should be invited to attend Deaf led events where they can see the practical implications of how sign language is used in context. This will inform the BSL action plan and experience this for themselves.

We also want BSL students to have opportunities to engage with Deaf people, which will enhance their career opportunities and CVs. All of these developments, teaching and training need to be delivered by Deaf teachers who can then provide the relevant experience and support.

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.

Clause seven. I do agree that DfC should do the practical work that is needed in terms of preparing additional information. It just must be done with us, by discussions with the various organisations, and, directly, with those of us who are part of the Deaf community. We need to be heard throughout the process and as long as they respect our viewpoints and acknowledge that this is to ensure our rights, then we accept that they are doing this work on our behalf.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

The aim of this Bill is to ultimately improve our quality of life, so DfC must ensure that they are consulting widely and taking on board our feedback, comments and suggestions. This is the way that this Bill should be approached, based on wide consultation.

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.

Clause Eight. This entire process will require ongoing collaboration between the Deaf community and the various government departments and bodies to ensure that learning is translated into best practice. As part of this process, there has to be some flexibility whereby changes can be made over time and the best possible outcome achieved. It will be crucial to have direct input from some Deaf representatives throughout this process so that they can advise and discuss.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause nine, I would agree and also disagree. As this is a first ever for NI, I believe that reviews should be carried out more frequently in the early stages. Perhaps every one or two years, until we can see how things are rolling out. Ultimately I do believe that a five year review may be appropriate, but not until everything has begun to get established and we have some visibility over how it is all proceeding.

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.

Clause ten. I would agree with this. [REDACTED] having to use an English based Curriculum, but adapt it to the needs of NI students, because our BSL dialect is so strong. We could develop our own, accredited system which I believe would be appreciated by students in NI. Interpreters also must be put through a system that is appropriately accredited, I have no hesitation in agreeing with this.

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

Yes

Please give details to support your answer.

I would much prefer to not have to rely on the current accreditation system, which is run by Signature, an English body. It would be so much more effective to have our own, locally develop system based on our own local dialect and language users. We want to preserve our own language use.

It is also so important that interpreters in NI are trained locally, in our own dialect, so that when they are out and about, they can understand and be easily understood by local Deaf people.

By bringing together the teaching and learning of sign language and interpreter training, we would be promoting and preserving our own dialect and, therefore, the culture of the NI Deaf community.

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.

Clause 11. There are four elements to this and they are all important, especially the fourth. All of this will reduce the high incidence, at present, of mental health illness in the Deaf community and lead to improved wellness and overall health. This is why we need a Bill that can be fully inclusive of everyone.

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.

Clause 12 – I fully agree, Sign Language is a beautiful, rich, visually motivated language with its own structures, grammar etc. Everything in this is correct.

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.

Clause 13 – this is crucial. Speaking from my own personal experience, I need this for my own wellbeing and my own mental health. I need to use BSL all day, every day, it is a visual language, so I watch it in different ways, with my family and friends, watching interpreters, watching signed programmes on TV. I see people around me in society who have the freedom to use speech on a daily basis, everywhere they go, but when I am around other people I have to try and use gesture and lipread where I can but it is frustrating and exhausting.

When I am using BSL, my own language, I actually breathe differently. I respect everyone's right to choose their language, but for me BSL is not an option, it is part of who I am and how I communicate. It's not just about access to information, it's how I express myself fully, it's who I am and how I communicate. Everyone should be able to understand others and have the right to express themselves in their first language. For me, this is BSL.

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.

Clause 14. I'd like to add in here that we need more Deaf people trained up to take on staff positions, such as social workers. There are so many benefits in having Deaf people in these jobs but as a minimum, staff should have level 3 to level 6 BSL qualifications. There is just no replacement for lived experience of the issues that Deaf people face throughout life. For example, working with deaf children, some of whom really struggle in mainstream settings and they need to be referred in to the Deaf school where there are teachers and staff who are Deaf themselves and can become role models for these children so that they have a sense of identity and how their potential can be achieved in life.

Social workers work with people throughout the life cycle – young and old and those who are struggling with their mental health. We really need these services to be reviewed and improvements made so that there is more effective access and support for everyone, at every stage.

This is why we really do need to have a building, whether new or an existing premises, that can become a focal point for all the Deaf organisations to come together and that will host events for Deaf people to attend. There are so many potential implications, there could be a team that works on compiling a new BSL dictionary, or works on developing a new app or other technological developments. These gatherings would have a knock on impact on the overall mental health of the community by providing a place to gather and share life. Without some kind of centre, people have to meet in small groups and this can exclude those who don't have their own cars or who are nervous about arranging to meet others. Regular events would lead to a better quality of life for all.

We know of situations where Deaf couples who want to become parents are turned down for adoption on the basis that they are deaf. This is just not fair, or equal opportunity.

Another related issue is that parents of deaf children need to understand that they must embrace sign language and use it in the family home. Some parents get access to sign language training, but they don't bother using it at home and the impact on the child is immense. The child may fall behind on school, which then has an impact on their mental health as they may become very anxious and distressed. This is actually neglect, which is a form of abuse. Too much of this is happening and it then falls on the school sector to try and pick up on this and get language into the child in the school setting, because the parents are not making the effort to sign, as they should.

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

Also in relation to Clause 14. There should be more BSL made visible, such as on the BBC news, in primetime slots, such as the evening news. So many people would benefit from this, Deaf people themselves, their families and friends, and sign language students who could all learn from watching the news going out at more accessible times for everyone.

With this new Bill, we would like BBC NI to put out a daily local news summary, in BSL. This should be delivered by a Deaf presenter, not just someone sitting beside one of the mainstream presenters, with the information also presented in text format, at the same time, for those who prefer to read. It would really enhance the viewer experience to see the news delivered, in their own language as we are all part of NI society and we all want to feel that we belong. Having this every evening, Monday to Friday would make such a difference to that sense of identity.

Overall, I've a few comments. Firstly, all of this work needs a Deaf member of staff being brought in to deal with all of the practical work – putting together the guidelines and engaging regularly with the committee. There is clearly a lot of work ahead and the Deaf perspective on all this will be crucial, moving forward.

Another issue that I see arising is how the workings of this new Act will be monitored. If a body does not comply with the new Act and therefore breaks the law, what are the procedures around that? How will the Deaf community know what to do? Do we go to a solicitor or report this in some way? If we do experience discrimination, it is important that we know in advance what we do about this and how to handle the processes involved. Now that there will be some protection built into our legal processes, is there an individual or a group that we can approach to act on our behalf? This needs to be considered.

Another few things. Access To Work budgets in NI need to be increased so that we have sufficient interpreter support in the work place. My budget is just not enough and I really struggle.

Also, we need some kind of fund that enables us to get interpreters provided for social settings, such as weddings or plays. At the minute we don't get access and this could make such a difference.