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Review of Costs: Sign Language Bill – Supplementary Information

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This Briefing Paper provides a summary of available information on the costs associated with sign language legislation in Great Britain, Scotland, Wales, and the Republic of Ireland.

This information is provided to Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in support of their duties, and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as professional legal advice, or as a substitute for it.

Introduction

This Briefing Paper, commissioned by the Committee for Communities, supplements the Research and Information Service (RaISe) Bill Paper “[Sign Language Bill \(Northern Ireland\) 2025](#)” (NIAR:24-25; dated 21 February 2025), which outlined the prevailing variable coverage in Great Britain, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. This Paper addresses the costs associated with sign language provision in those jurisdictions, drawing on available costing information, where available, and presenting with the following section headings:

- 1: Northern Ireland
- 2: Great Britain
- 3: Scotland
- 4: Wales
- 5: Republic of Ireland
- 6: Key takeaways

1 Northern Ireland

The [Sign Language \(Northern Ireland\) Bill](#) was introduced into the Northern Ireland Assembly on 10 February 2025. It is currently at Committee Stage. As noted in the RaISe Bill Paper “[Sign Language Bill \(Northern Ireland\) 2025](#)” (NIAR:24-25), the Bill’s Explanatory and Financial Memorandum (EFM) included limited information on the potential financial effects of the Bill – inclusive of those estimated costs that would be incurred by the public purse, if the Bill would be enacted as introduced. The EFM stated:

*There will be no immediate financial implications – outside of the current disability adjustments – because **the Bill takes enabling powers to implement duties which may incur costs at a later date.***¹ [Emphasis added]

The EFM added:

¹ Sign Language Bill [EFM - As Introduced](#) (accessed 19 February 2025)

There will be need to develop and fund the appropriate level of infrastructure and scheme to deliver on the intent of the Bill and these will be outlined by the Department of Communities which may by regulations make provision for these associated matters.²

2 Great Britain

The British Sign Language Act 2022 received Royal Assent in April 2022. It was introduced to “recognise British Sign Language (BSL) as a language of England, Wales and Scotland”. It also placed a requirement on the Secretary of State “to report on the promotion and facilitation of [BSL] by ministerial government departments” and to require guidance to be issued in relation to BSL.³

The Explanatory Notes that accompanied the Bill’s introduction to the House of Commons stated that:

The Bill does not impose any new costs on Ministerial Departments. It does place a requirement on them to report on their use and facilitation of British Sign Language, but this requirement in itself should not impose additional costs as the Bill is not seeking anything outside of the requirements/consideration already within the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Act.⁴

Since the Bill received Royal Assent, as required under the Act, the United Kingdom Government has issued three reports setting out how Ministerial Departments have used BSL. The most recent report covers the period May 2024 to April 2023, and [was published in July 2025](#). That report, like the two that preceded it⁵, did not include any information on the financial impact of meeting the Act’s provisions. The latest report did note, however, the Cabinet Office and the Whitehall Department for Work and Pensions were the

² The Sign Language Bill [EFM - As Introduced](#) (accessed 19 February 2025)

³ [British Sign Language Act 2022 - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

⁴ British Sign Language Bill 2022 as introduced, [Explanatory Notes](#)

⁵ The first report covered the period 28 June 2023 to 30 April 2023 is available [here](#). The Second, covering 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024 is available [here](#).

departments that have produced the most BSL content in the reporting period.

The report added:

There were five government departments which reported not having any BSL communication during this third reporting period. This is still significantly lower than the first report, where 11 departments produced no BSL communications. It should be noted that a number of departments create a limited amount of external-facing communications.⁶

The above quote reveals that the provision of BSL communication is not equal across all United Kingdom government departments. It also points out that this may be a result of the function of departments, with some having a more limited customer facing role.

3 Scotland

In Scotland, the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, came into force in October 2015. The Act required listed authorities to develop BSL plans that outlined how they would “promote and raise awareness of the language”.⁷

At stage 2 of the Bill’s passage through the Scottish Parliament, the Bill was amended, extending the remit of the bill including the number of public bodies that would be subject to the Bill’s provisions. At that point, a revised Financial Memorandum was produced. This included the estimated costs associated with the “production of plans” by 106 listed authorities. It also included the costs falling to the Scottish Administration of producing a national plan and progress reports. Both sets of estimates were published - as per financial year costs, and as a cost over six-year cycle.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the first category of costs – the costs associated with listed authorities producing and reporting on their own plans – as set out in the Financial Memorandum. As can be seen from the Table, the estimated cost of the production of plans and reporting was £530,00 per year,

⁶ The Cabinet Office, The British Sign Language (BSL) report, 2024 to 2025, (1 July 2025) [British Sign Language \(BSL\) third report, May 2024 to April 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ Scottish Government [British Sign Language - Languages - gov.scot](#) (accessed 18 August 2025)

or £3,180,000 over six years. That is based on an estimated production reporting costs of £30,000 per authority over six years. The cost to the Scottish Government – as set out in Table 1 - is the cost of two non-ministerial department – namely the Scottish Charity Regulator and the Scottish Housing Regulator – which are part of the Scottish Government, but would be required to produce and report on a plan under the Bill provisions (see Sections 2 and 6 of the final BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 for details⁸).

Table 1: The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act, estimated costs associated with the production of plans and contribution to the progress report by 106 listed authorities required to publish their own plans (at second stage)⁹

Cost category	Cost per financial year (2015-16 to 2020-21)	Cost over six year cycle (2015-16 to 2020-21)
Total for all 32 local authorities	£160,000	£960,000
Total for 72 other bodies	£360,000	£2,160,000
Scottish Administration	£10,000	£60,000
Total	£530,000	£3,180,000

Source: Scottish Parliament ([2015](#))

Table 2, below, provides an overview of the second category of costs – Production of National Plan and national progress report – as set out in the Financial Memorandum. Again, this information is presented as per financial year and over a six-year period. As can be seen from the Table, the largest category of costs was estimated to arise from consulting, with BSL users on the National Plan and progress report (estimated as £100,000 per year, or £600,000 over six years). Other significant cost categories were:

⁸ [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)

⁹ [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Bill - Parliamentary Business : Scottish Parliament](#)

- Supporting engagement with deafblind BSL users
- Engaging with national bodies
- Establishing a National Advisory Group
- Scottish Government staff time

The total cost to the Scottish Government on producing and reporting on a National Plan was estimated to be £255,000 per year, or £1,530,000 over six years.

To date, the Scottish Government has produced two BSL National Plans since the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force. The first covered the period 2017 to 2023¹⁰, the second covers the period 2023 to 2029.¹¹

Table 2: The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act, estimated costs associated with the production of a National Plan (covering 41 public bodies) and national progress reporting (at second stage)¹²

Cost category	Cost per financial year (2015-16 to 2020-21)	Cost over six year cycle (2015-16 to 2020- 21)
Consulting with BSL users on National Plan and Progress report	£100,000	£600,000
Supporting engagement with deafblind BSL users	£70,000	£420,000
Engaging with national bodies covered by the plan	£25,000	£150,000

¹⁰ The Scottish Government, British Sign Language Plan 2017 to 2023 (October 2017) [British Sign Language \(BSL\): National Plan 2017 to 2023 - gov.scot](#)

¹¹ The Scottish Government, British Sign Language Plan 2023 to 2029 (November 2023) [British Sign Language \(BSL\): national plan 2023 to 2029 - gov.scot](#)

¹² [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Bill - Parliamentary Business : Scottish Parliament](#)

Cost category	Cost per financial year (2015-16 to 2020-21)	Cost over six year cycle (2015-16 to 2020- 21)
Establishing/supporting a National Advisory Group	£25,000	£150,000
Scottish Government staff time	£35,000	£210,000
Total	£225,000	£1,530,000

Source: Scottish Parliament ([2015](#))

Taking the two cost categories of costs together (as set out in Tables 1 and 2 above), the total costs of the implementing the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, as estimated at its Second Stage, were:

- £755,000 per financial year
- £4,530,000 over a six year cycle

A progress report on the first Scottish BSL National Plan, covering the period 2017 to 2023, was published in October 2021. This report contained no further information on the public purse impacts of BSL provision in Scotland.¹³

The Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry in the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) provided the Committee with a summary of evidence to the inquiry in June 2025; noting stakeholders attending an oral evidence session on 3 June 2025 had expressed concerns that there was "insufficiency funding to support the aims of the Act".¹⁴

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee plans to publish an inquiry report in Autumn 2025, it is not clear at the time of writing whether that

¹³ Scottish Government [British Sign Language - national plan: progress report - gov.scot](#) (October 2021)

¹⁴ Scottish Parliament, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee [Committee meeting paper](#) (June 2025)

report will include any further details on the cost and funding of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.¹⁵

4 Wales

The “British Sign Language (Wales) Bill was introduced into Senedd Cymru on 14 July 2025, and is currently in Stage 1. The Bill, as introduced, included provision for the Welsh Government to:

- Promote and facilitate the use of British Sign Language (BSL).
- Publish a National BSL Strategy describing how the intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL and report progress.
- Produce guidance for public bodies listed in the Bill about promoting and facilitating the use of BSL.
- Appoint a BSL adviser and a panel to assist the adviser.¹⁶

The Explanatory Memorandum that accompanied the Bill estimated that the total cost to the public purse would be between £3,759,800 to £4,140,600 over a 10-year period. That total cost includes costs to both the Welsh Government and Listed Public Bodies¹⁷ (LPB).¹⁸

Table 3, below, provides a breakdown of the estimated ten-year costs to the Welsh Government. As can be seen from the Table, the largest cost of over the period was estimated for funding the appointment of a BSL Advisor, which was estimated to cost £1,131,800 over the ten-year period. The costs associated with preparing a Welsh BSL Strategy and the reporting on that Strategy are predicated to occur only on specific years (as noted in the Table). The total cost of preparing and reporting on two strategies was £230,800.

¹⁵ Scottish Parliament, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee [Committee meeting paper](#) (June 2025)

¹⁶ Senedd Cymru [British Sign Language \(Wales\) Bill](#) (14 July 2025)

¹⁷ Listed Public Bodies are public bodies that will be required to promote and facilitate the use of BSL. The bodies are not currently set out in the Bill and will be determined through Secondary Legislation.

¹⁸ [The British Sign Language \(Wales\) Bill Explanatory Memorandum](#) (14 July 2025)

Table 3: Summary of the 10-year costs to the Welsh Government (2026-27 to 2035-26) of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill (£)¹⁹

Cost Category	Estimate 10-year costs
Adviser	£1,131,800
Assisting Panel	£247,000
Prepare first National BSL Strategy and guidance (2026-27 to 2027-28)	£106,100
Report on Strategy (2029-30 to 2030-31, 2032-33 to 2033-34, and 2035-36)	£60,100
Updated BSL Strategy (2032-33 to 2033-34)	£64,600
Total	£1,609,600

Source: The Welsh Parliament ([2025](#))

Table 4, below, provides a 10-year breakdown of estimated costs predicted to be incurred by LPB should the Bill be enacted. This includes a low and a high estimate of the costs associated with preparation and publishing of a BSL Plan. This is also the largest cost, estimated between £711,900 to £1,902,700 over ten years. The remaining costs anticipated to arise from report on and reviewing/updating BSL plans. The total costs to LPBs over ten years was estimated to be £2,150,200 to £2,531,000.

¹⁹ [The British Sign Language \(Wales\) Bill Explanatory Memorandum](#) (14 July 2025)

Table 4: Summary of the 10-year costs to LPB (2026-27 to 2035-26) of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill (£)²⁰

Cost Category	Low estimated 10-year costs	High estimated 10-year costs
BSL Plan	711,900	1,092,700
Reporting on BSL Plan	726,400	726,400
Review/updating of BSL Plan	711,900	711,900
Total	2,150,200	2,531,000

Source: The Welsh Parliament ([2025](#))

5 Republic of Ireland

The [Irish Sign Language Act 2017](#) was signed into law on the 24 December 2017 and commenced on the 23 December 2020.²¹ In summary, the Act:

- Recognised Irish Sign Language (ISL) as a “native language”.
- Set out the right of the ISL community to “use, preserve and develop the language”
- Required public bodies to do “all that is reasonable” to provide free ISL interpretation for ISL users when accessing “statutory entitlements” or services “provided by or under statute” by public bodies.
- Established a right to use ISL in court and required courts to do “all that is reasonable” to ensure ISL are not disadvantaged in courts.
- Requires all public bodies to only use ISL interpreters to that have been accredited through the government funded scheme.
- Placed obligations on the Minister for Education to:
 - Provide ISL classes for families of deaf children

²⁰ [The British Sign Language \(Wales\) Bill Explanatory Memorandum](#) (14 July 2025)

²¹ [Minister Rabbitte announces commencement of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017](#)

- Establish a scheme to promote ISL support for children who attend ISL schools
- Ensure there a sufficient number higher education offering ISL training for teachers
- Set minimum qualifications of teachers for children who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Required broadcasters to act by principles of equality dignity and respect when promoting and broadcasting ISL programmes.
- Allowed for the option of scheme to fund ISL access to event.²²

In addition to the above, the Act required that the relevant Minister must “receive a report on the operation of the Act no later than three years after the Act is enacted, and every five years after that”. The National Disability Authority prepared the first report on the act in December 2021. That report was published by the Irish Government in January 2023.²³

The report did not include any breakdown of the financial implications of meeting the duties set out under the act. It did, however, note that 31% of public bodies were unaware of the ISL Act prior to being surveyed about it for the purposes of the report. In addition, only 36% of the public bodies that responded to the survey stated that they were fully compliant with the Act.²⁴ Furthermore, only 20.9% of public bodies had ring-fenced budgets to allow access to services through ISL. Conversely, 65.3% of public bodies had not ring-fenced budgets for such purposes (the remainder responded “don’t know” to this question).²⁵

In addition to the above, it is worth noting that that the statutory body the Citizens Information Board provides funding to agencies with ISL responsibilities. The Sign Language Interpreting Service for Ireland (SLIS), which “promotes, represents and ensures the availability of quality interpretation services to Deaf people in Ireland”. According to the latest CIB accounts, the

²²National Disability Authority, [Report of the Operation of the Irish Language Act](#) (December 2021)

²³ National Disability Authority, [Report of the Operation of the Irish Language Act](#) (December 2021) y

²⁴ National Disability Authority, [Report of the Operation of the Irish Language Act](#) (December 2021)

²⁵ National Disability Authority, [Report of the Operation of the Irish Language Act – Technical Annex 2](#) (December 2021)

SLIS received funding of €613,542 in 2023. The Regulatory Centre for Irish Sign Language Interpreters, is the registration system for ISL interpreters referenced in the 2017 Irish Sign Language Act. The latest CIB account show that that body received funding of €249,724 in 2023.

In addition, the SLIS is responsible for operating the ISL **Social Inclusion Voucher Scheme**. Section 9 of the ISL Act 2017 provided the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection with the power to fund a scheme that enabled ISL users to receive support when attending events and accessing services. The Social Inclusion Voucher Scheme allows ISL users to access ISL-English interpreting and to facilitate such access. In a prebudget Submission to Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development, SLIS' proposed budget for operating the voucher scheme in 2025 was €426,475. This included both operation and promotional activities.²⁶

Other types of costs were highlighted during a series of Questions to Ministers in the Oireachtas on the 9 April 2025. The examples demonstrate that new roles, procedures, processes and services have resulted from the ISL Act 2017. Such examples included the following:

- The Department for Education introduced a ISL Home Tuition Scheme in line with Section 5(a) of the ISL Act 2017. This has a budget of €300,000 per year. It has also developed a scheme for ISL classroom support and intends to develop ISL teaching within the curriculum.²⁷
- A number of Departments have provided ISL interpretation at Departmental events (such as the Department for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media).²⁸
- The Irish Passport Service employed two members of staff who can provide ISL interpretation. Four additional staff were receiving training in ISL Language.²⁹

²⁶ [2024-07-19_submission-sign-language-interpreting-service_en.pdf](#)

²⁷ [Irish Sign Language – Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

²⁸ [Irish Sign Language – Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

²⁹ [Irish Sign Language – Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

- Some Departments, including the Department for Transport, had appointed an Access Officer to coordinate “assistance and guidance, to persons with disabilities accessing services” provided by the Department.³⁰
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has developed a Monitoring Committee to collect relevant ISL performance data for the Department and its agencies. These data are provided to National Disability Authority.³¹
- The Department for Justice provides ISL interpretation at Citizenship Ceremonies. The Court Service of Ireland has introduced a key performance indicator to provide an ISL interpreter to every court user who identifies they require one in advance of a hearing. An Garda Síochána have made changes to process to enhance ISL interpretation. For example, each Garda region is required to nominate a central point of contact to consult the Register of ISL Interpreters. An ISL interpreted video of the Judges Caution is available on all Garda mobile devices.³²

Other responses, such as that from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, noted that the Department was not public facing and that to date no request for ISL interpretations had been received.³³ This highlights the potential for varying demands on different departments, depending on their functions and the extent to which they provide services directly to the public.

6 Key takeaways

This Briefing Paper has examined available information on the predicted or actual costs associated with sign language provision in other jurisdictions, namely Great Britain, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

³⁰ [Irish Sign Language – Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

³¹ [Irish Sign Language – Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

³² [Irish Sign Language – Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

³³ [Wednesday, 9 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

The Briefing is intended to support the Committee for Communities in their scrutiny of the Sign Language (Northern Ireland) Bill 2025. The following may be of interest to the Committee when considering the Northern Ireland Bill:

- **Great Britain:** The Explanatory Notes that accompanied the British Sign Language Act 2022 stated that the Act would not impose any new costs on Ministerial Departments. Regular reporting on the Act has not, to date, included any assessment of the financial impact of the Act on United Kingdom government departments. That reporting does reveal that the impact of the act is not equal across all departments, with some having limited need to produce BSL communications due to a limited public facing role.
- **Scotland:** Estimates produced during the passage of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015's through the Scottish Parliament projected that the Act would result in costs to the public purse of £755,000 per financial year over the period 2015 to 2021. This included various categories of costs associated with:
 - listed authorities producing BSL plans
 - producing a national BSL plan and progressing reporting
 - engaging with BSL community
 - staff costs

Subsequent reporting on the implementation of the Act's provision was found to contain no further detail on the costs to the public purse.

Evidence to an ongoing Scottish Parliament Committee inquiry into the Act has expressed concerns that insufficient funding has been made available to support the aims of the Act. That Committee inquiry is anticipated to report in Autumn 2025.

- **Wales:** The British Sign Language Act (Wales) Bill was introduced into the Welsh Parliament on 14 July 2025. Estimates of costs that accompanied the Bill projected that it would cost to the public purse would be between £3,759,800 to £4,140,600 over a 10-year period. This includes costs to the Welsh Government and Listed Public Bodies. The costing information identified some discreet categories of cost associated with the Bill's provisions, including costs associated with:

- funding a BSL Adviser
 - assisting a BSL Panel
 - preparing and reporting on a National BSL strategy
 - Listed Public Bodies preparing and reporting on BSL plans
- **Republic of Ireland:** The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 was signed into law on the 24 December 2017 and commenced on the 23 December 2020. As per the Act's provisions, a report on the its operation was produced by the National Disability Authority was prepared in 2021 and published in January 2023. That report did not include any breakdown of the costs associated with meeting the acts provisions, but did note that only 20.9% of public bodies had ring-fenced budgets to provide access to services through ISL. Some categories of costs have been identified from other sources, namely mainly Citizens Information Board accounts and Oireachtas Questions. These categories include cost associated with:
 - funding ISL related bodies
 - funding a Social Inclusion voucher scheme
 - providing ISL interpretation at department events
 - funding an ISL Home Tuition Scheme
 - training staff in ISL
 - proving ISL interpretation in the Court Service and An Garda Síochána

As is the case with the Great Britain example above, some government Departments in the Republic of Ireland reported limited ISL provision due to their role requiring limited public interaction.