

Response to NI Assembly

Council's response to the Sign Language Bill – Call for Evidence.

[Sign Language Bill - Call for Evidence - Page 1 of 17 - Northern Ireland Assembly - Citizen Space](#)

Please confirm you have read the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee privacy notice by clicking the button below:

[Privacy Notice](#)

(tick) I have read the privacy notice

Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report?

(0) Yes, publish in full.

(tick) Yes, publish but my personal information and any content that could be used to identify me redacted.

Clause 1

Clause 1 formally recognises BSL and ISL equally as languages of Northern Ireland, whilst preserving the architecture of existing disability and equality legislation.

Do you feel Clause 1 goes far enough in formally recognising BSL and ISL as languages of Northern Ireland?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 1 clearly states that British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) is formally recognised as languages of Northern Ireland, whilst preserving the architecture of existing disability and equality legislation that applies to Northern Ireland.

(261 characters)

Clause 2

Clause 2 places a duty on the Department for Communities to promote:

- the greater use and understanding of BSL and ISL (including an obligation to provide for the availability of classes BSL and ISL for deaf children, their close families, guardians and carers);

- the general entitlement of individuals in the deaf community to use BSL or ISL; and,
- the further development of deaf culture by the deaf community through the use of BSL and ISL.

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

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We are supportive of this Clause. We welcome the inclusion of available classes for deaf children, their close families, guardians, carers and individuals in the deaf community to learn BSL or ISL.

(197 characters)

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 (tick)

No (tick)

Clause 3

Clause 3 places a duty on prescribed organisations to take reasonable steps to:

- ensure the information and services provided by them are as accessible to members of the deaf community as they are to the people who are not in the deaf community, at no extra cost to them; and,
- offer or facilitate the use of BSL or ISL for the benefit of individuals in the deaf community in accessing information and services provided by the organisation.

In considering what is reasonable, prescribed organisations may take account of cost and practicability.

[Further details are available in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum included with the Bill which you can read here.](#)

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 (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We have a Language Strategy which includes Sign Languages as one of the language strands therefore as a public body, we are committed to making sure our information and services are accessible to members of the deaf community.

(226 characters)

Clause 4

Clause 4 provides for the Department for Communities to list the public bodies (known as the prescribed organisations) that are subject to the duties in Clause 3.

Do you support the approach taken by Clause 4?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

As a public body, we support this approach.

(44 characters)

Clause 5

Clause 5 states that the Department for Communities must issue guidance about the effects of the provisions in the Bill relating to BSL and ISL and the interests of the deaf community. This clause states that, when devising or revising guidance the Department for Communities must consult:

- each of the prescribed organisations; and,
- at least one person or group appearing to the Department to be acting on behalf of the deaf community.

Do you support the approach to consultation required in Clause 5?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We will welcome the opportunity to work with the Department for Communities to ensure our information and services are accessible to Sign Language users.

(154 characters)

Clause 6

Clause 6 states that the Department for Communities guidance should include best practice advice on the implications of the recognition of BSL and ISL in the Bill for public bodies, including prescribed organisations. This would include:

- what may or must be viewed as amounting to reasonable steps to be taken by prescribed organisations;
- how prescribed organisations should develop plans to be called sign language action plans; and,
- advice on best practice for interacting with people who rely for communication on BSL or ISL.

Do you support the approach taken in this clause?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We are satisfied with this approach. We have a Language Strategy Action Plan which covers actions to improve Sign Language provision within the Council therefore we are supportive of developing Sign Language Actions plans and the use of best practice advice and guidance from the Department for Communities.

(309 characters)

Do you feel there is anything else this Clause should include?

Yes

No (tick)

Please give details to support your answer.

Clause 7

Clause 7 makes provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations (some time in the future) for the purposes of the Bill.

The Department for Communities will have the power to create new regulations to support the Sign Language Bill. These regulations are a different form of law, with working detail and may cover things like **how** public services provide sign language access and **how** organisations support sign language users. These future regulations would also need to come before the Assembly for scrutiny and agreement before they come into effect.

The Department for Communities must consult with the deaf community and relevant organisations before making changes. It can assign responsibilities to public bodies, charities, or groups working with the deaf community.

If needed, the Department for Communities can limit or adjust requirements for certain organisations based on their resources. Any changes must be approved by the Assembly before they become law.

Do you support the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations detailed in Clause 7?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We welcome the provision for the Department for Communities to make regulations. It is important we are consulted and that our financial and resources implications are considered when drafting the regulations.

(210 characters)

Do you support the approach to consultation detailed in Clause 7?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We welcome the approach to be consulted on the drafting of the regulations.

(76 characters)

Clause 8

Clause 8 states that, before laying a draft of such regulations, the Department for Communities must consult everyone on whom the regulations confer functions, and at least one person or group appearing to the Department to be acting on behalf of the deaf community. Such regulations need to be laid before and approved by the Assembly.

Do you feel the level of consultation required in Clause 8 is sufficient?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We support this level of consultation which includes all listed prescribed organisations being involved in the process of drafting regulations.

(138 characters)

Clause 9

Clause 9 would require the Department for Communities to prepare a report evaluating the impact of the Bill within five years of the Bill's commencement and every five years thereafter.

Do you think evaluating the impact of the Bill in a report every five years is an appropriate length of time?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

We are supportive of an evaluation report being produced every five years showcasing the impact made.

(102 characters)

Clause 10

Clause 10 provides that the Department for Communities must make a scheme for, or connected to, the accreditation of (either or both) teachers of BSL or ISL, and/or interpreters of BSL or ISL.

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL teachers?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

An accreditation scheme for BSL and ISL teachers would assist in our on-going work within the Council's Language Strategy Action Plan. We will be able to identify, approach and supply accredited teachers to deliver Sign Language courses for council staff.

(245 characters)

Do you support the creation of a scheme for accrediting BSL and ISL interpreters?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer.

An accreditation scheme for BSL and ISL interpreters would assist the Council in making sure qualified interpreters are placed for required and requested

bookings made by Council staff. The scheme will also assist deaf employees in the Council by being able to book qualified interpreters for communication purposes in the workplace.

(334 characters)

Clause 11

Clause 11 defines, for the purposes of the Bill, the deaf community as all people falling within one or more of the following categories:

- (a) individuals who rely for communication on BSL or ISL;
- (b) deaf or deafblind people who normally use BSL or ISL for communication (including people who can obtain some or better levels of hearing when assisted by auditory devices); or
- (c) children of deaf or deafblind people who habitually or occasionally use BSL or ISL for communication (including children who have some or full hearing).

Clause 11 also provides that people who (whether or not they have some or full hearing) have little or no understanding of spoken or written language in English but are able to communicate effectively in BSL or ISL, are to be regarded as if members of the deaf community for the purposes of the Bill.

Do you agree with the definition of the deaf community provided for in the Bill?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer. Please outline what people or groups you think should be included or excluded and why.

We agree with the inclusion of the above categories as people belonging to the deaf community.

(95 characters)

Clause 12

Clause 12 defines, for the purposes of the Bill, BSL or ISL as either or both of the visual form of the Language as commonly used and understood by deaf people, and the common tactile or non-visual forms of the Language as used and understood by some deafblind people.

Do you agree with the definition of BSL and ISL provided for in the Bill?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.

We agree with this definition of BSL and ISL.

(46 characters)

Clause 13

Clause 13 defines, for the purposes of the Bill, everyday reliance on BSL or ISL as relying (wholly or substantially) on BSL or ISL by necessity or for convenience in the course of everyday activities.

Do you agree with the definition of “everyday reliance” provided in the Bill?

Yes (tick)

No

Please give details to support your answer. If you think there are any aspects missing, please outline what you think should be included.

We agree with this definition of “everyday reliance” on BSL and ISL.

Any other comments

Is there anything which you expected the Bill to make provision for which has not been included in the Bill?

Yes (tick)

No (tick)

Please give details to support your answer.

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

Please note this is an officer response on behalf of Belfast City Council which will require ratification by full Council at their meeting in June

(Submit response)