

Chime Advocacy Newsletter

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Chime is the National Charity for deafness and hearing loss. Since 1964 we have championed the rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) people in Ireland.

Chime's Advocacy Newsletter aims to inform key stakeholders, including public representatives, of the priority issues affecting D/HH people that Chime is currently advocating on. The newsletter provides an overview of why the priority issues are important, what progress has been made to date, and the next steps in our campaigning efforts.

FEATURED IN THIS EDITION:

- **Advocating for a national hearing care plan Pg 1**
- **Report on operation of ISL Act Pg 3**
- **Failure to support Deaf people in the workplace .. Pg 4**
- **ISL voucher scheme Pg 5**
- **Deaf education: the need to publish outcomes Pg 6**

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Chime
The National Charity for
Deafness and Hearing Loss

Hearing Loss – the need for a national plan

In May 2023 Chime met with Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly, T.D., to discuss the need for a national plan to address the hearing needs of the population. The Minister accepted that an integrated approach was needed and that audiology waiting lists were too long. He said that he expected action on the waiting lists in the next few months and committed to having a discussion with stakeholders to identify the best model of practice for addressing the hearing needs of the population into the future.

Over the past few years Chime has strived to create awareness of the high level of unaddressed hearing loss amongst Irish adults and the long HSE audiology waiting lists. Ireland has a very low uptake of hearing aids compared to other countries in Europe, and there are significant health consequences that result from this, particularly in terms of cognitive decline, dementia and depression. The impact is so significant that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has urged Governments to develop national hearing care plans for their populations.

Furthermore, the WHO estimate that for every €1 invested in hearing care, Governments can expect a return of almost €16 over the following 10 years.¹

Facts about Hearing Loss in Ireland

- **300,000 adults have a hearing loss that requires treatment – typically with hearing aids.²**
- **Only one in five of these people have the hearing aids they need.³**
- **Ireland prescribes hearing aids at approximately half the rate of other European countries.⁴**
- **8% of dementia is preventable through early treatment of hearing loss.⁵**
- **Based on recent research into hearing loss and depression⁶, Chime estimates that 50,000 people in Ireland have depression due to unmanaged hearing loss.**

Waiting Lists too long

There are currently around 20,000 children and adults on HSE audiology waiting lists. Minister Donnelly agreed that the waiting lists are too long, pointed out that there was €350m available to tackle waiting lists generally, and that he expected the HSE to take steps to reduce audiology lists in the next few months.

Need for 'integrated view' on a national plan for hearing care

Minister Donnelly agreed with Chime that there was a need for an 'integrated view' of how best to meet the audiology needs of the population, but did not favour setting up a cross departmental working group. Instead he committed to the Department of Health discussing the issues with other stakeholders such as the Department of Social Protection to identify the best model of practice going forward. The Minister promised that the Department would revert to Chime with a progress report on this in the coming months.

- 1 WHO World Report on Ear and Hearing Care (WHO, 2021).
- 2 HSE Audiology Review (2011).
- 3 Health and Wellbeing: Active Ageing for Older Adults in Ireland (TILDA, 2017).
- 4 European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association. Market Statistics Reports (2016–2020).
- 5 Dementia prevention, intervention, and care. (Lancet Commission, 2020).
- 6 Blake et al. Hearing Loss and Depression in Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (2020).

Hearing Aid Provision in Ireland 2022

Hearing Aid provision in Ireland is currently a mix of public and private provision. Currently approximately 80% of provision is through private providers.

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| HSE | 20% |
| Private purchase <i>(with PRSI grant)</i> | 50% |
| Private purchase <i>(with no grant)</i> | 30% |

ISL Act Report:

Still major gaps in supports for the Deaf community

The National Disability Authority (NDA) report on the operation of the Irish Sign Language Act was published on January 13th 2023 after a delay of over 12 months. The Report is highly critical of many public bodies for their failure to provide full access to public services for Deaf citizens who communicate through Irish Sign Language (ISL).

ISL became Ireland's third recognised indigenous language when the ISL Act was passed by the Oireachtas and signed into law by the President on December 24th 2017. The Act not only recognised ISL, but also had contained commitments regarding the provision of services and supports to Deaf citizens, including specific sections dealing with education, legal proceedings, broadcasting and access to social and cultural events.

Much more to do

Launching the report Ministers O'Gorman and Rabbitte acknowledged that much more needs to be done to support the Deaf community in accordance with the ISL Act.

“Overall, the ISL Act is not yet operating as intended, with significant gaps in knowledge and understanding of the responsibilities of public bodies under the Act. Implementation was noted to be poor across most sections of the Act, with many public bodies appearing unprepared for the activities needed to achieve compliance.”⁷

Minister O'Gorman said that...

“The report clearly indicates that we have work to do to ensure that the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 supports as intended the 50,000 people who communicate in ISL on a daily basis and the 5,000 native Deaf signers within that number whose preferred language is ISL.”

Minister Rabbitte said that...

“this report tells us what users of ISL have known for a long time, which is that we need to do much more to ensure that ISL users are supported in accessing their statutory entitlements through their preferred language.”

Chime welcomed the publication of the report and the frankness of the Ministers in acknowledging what needs to be done. Priorities in this regard include better access to supports in education, employment* and health, and the establishment of the so called 'voucher scheme' to enable Deaf people to participate in social, cultural and other citizen activities.

Chime will be working closely with other Deaf organisations to advocate strongly for the re-introduction of a permanent voucher scheme as soon as possible (for more see page 7).

*Read our article on employment and the failure to support Deaf people in the workplace below.

⁷ Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act (NDA, 2021).

Department of Social Protection failing Deaf workers

The Department of Social Protection continues in its failure to support Deaf workers in the workplace. The Department has failed to bring forward proposals to improve the Reasonable Accommodation Fund (RAF) – proposals which were due back in 2019.

The RAF seeks to support the employment of people with disabilities to access, improve or retain their employment through supports for employers and/or employees. However, while grants for technology or adaptations in the workplace are available through the RAF, it is not currently possible to get support in ISL in the workplace.

The Department had committed to review the operation of the RAF in 2019, to finalise the review in Q4 and begin implementation of recommendations in Q1 2020.⁸ In reality, a public consultation was not completed until April 2022, and while we understand a report has been drafted, it has not yet been published and nothing has changed.

Nothing has changed

In 2019 RTE broadcast a documentary called London Calling.⁹ The documentary featured three young Irish Deaf people who had emigrated to London to seek employment. The documentary showed how these three

young people were able to develop their careers through having communication support in the workplace under the UK's Access to Work scheme. In two cases the participants availed of sign language interpreters to support them in their work, while in the third case, the person used live captions for meetings and phone calls.

London Calling:

One person was a supervisor in a retail setting and one was a senior manager in a local authority – roles that are virtually impossible for Deaf people to get in an Irish workplace.



The communication supports were critical for the Deaf workers in the documentary to fulfil their roles and progress their careers. One had become a supervisor in a retail setting and one was a senior manager in a local authority – roles that are virtually impossible for Deaf people to get in an Irish workplace.

Today, more than 5 years after the passing of the ISL Act, a Deaf person is still not entitled to any sign language support in the workplace – nothing has changed. The Department of Social Protection has still not fulfilled its commitment to publish the review of the RAF, now almost 4 years overdue.

In the coming months Chime will be redoubling our efforts to get the Department of Social Protection to implement changes to the RAF that will enable Deaf people to participate with equal opportunities in the workplace into the future.

⁸ Comprehensive Employment Strategy, Phase Two Action Plan 2019 – 2021.

⁹ London Calling, available to view at:

<https://www.rte.ie/player/movie/london-calling/100117032437>

ISL Voucher Scheme: Deaf community still waiting



Chime is calling on the Minister for Social Protection to introduce a permanent ISL 'voucher' scheme immediately, as provided for in Section 9 of the ISL Act 2017. The aim of the scheme is to support Deaf citizens to access social, educational and cultural events and participate in community activities on a par with their hearing peers. We are asking the Minister to ensure that funding for this scheme is contained in Budget 2024.

There was a very successful pilot scheme in 2021, and we understand there will be another scheme launched later in 2023. However, as yet it has not been confirmed if this new scheme will roll into a permanent scheme.

The pilot scheme was known as the 'voucher scheme' within the Deaf community, and it ran for approximately 3 months. It was a tremendous success – but now the Deaf community will have been waiting for almost two years for a follow-up scheme to be established.

What did Deaf people use the 'vouchers' for?

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|--|------------|
| Medical consultations | 26% |
| Social events | 24% |
| Education and training | 20% |
| Public events and professional services | 18% |
| Other | 12% |

Deaf people used the vouchers for medical consultations, to attend night classes or to make a will – allowing them to partake in these activities with full communication on a par with their hearing citizens.

Idalle told us that she used the voucher scheme to meet with her solicitor to make a will, while Breda used it for barista training.

We asked some Deaf people to tell us about how they felt about the using the voucher scheme. They told us that it reduced stress, increased access and made them feel more independent and empowered.

You can find out more about how people used the scheme at this link: <https://www.chime.ie/news/5th-anniversary-of-isl-act>

Chime is calling on the Minister for Social Protection to act without further delay and put the voucher scheme on a secure permanent footing by providing funding in Budget 2024.

The education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: no data on outcomes

In November 2022 Chime and a number of parents met with the Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, Josepha Madigan, T.D., to discuss concerns about the education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) students in Ireland. A number of issues were raised, including the lack of data on educational outcomes, the ISL Schools scheme, teacher training and the new resource allocation model.

The Minister agreed with Chime that there was insufficient information on how D/HH students were progressing in our schools.

There are just over 5,000 D/HH students in our schools. In our previous newsletter we highlighted the lack of data on how these children are progressing in our schools. This is despite the 2011 report of the National Council Special Education (NCSE): The Education of Deaf and

Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland, which stated that there needed to be a sustained emphasis on measuring the outcomes for children with special educational needs, including outcomes for those children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.¹¹

Chime is calling on the Minister for Special Education to publish annual reports on the educational outcomes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

NCSE Objective

"Deaf and Hard of Hearing children graduate from school with levels of attainment that are on a par with their hearing peers of similar ability".¹⁰

Need for data on educational outcomes

Minister Madigan in agreeing that there was a lack of data on educational outcomes suggested that Chime discuss this with the NCSE. She also advised that we raise the issue of teacher qualifications with the Teaching Council. In early 2023 Chime met with the NCSE, as advised by the Minister. The NCSE said that they were already looking at identifying a range of outcomes for children under their remit, that they would examine the idea of publishing educational outcomes for D/HH students, and would revert to us again in a number of months.

Chime also met with the Teaching Council, as advised by the Minister, to discuss the issue of minimum qualifications for teachers of Deaf children. The introduction of minimum qualifications for teachers of Deaf children is allowed for in Section 5(d) of the ISL Act. In the UK over 90% of teachers of Deaf children have a post graduate qualification in Deaf education.¹¹ Chime believes that only a fraction of teachers of Deaf children in Ireland have a similar qualification. Indeed, there is no post graduate course in Deaf education currently available in Ireland.

Available evidence a cause for concern

While there is no data or research available on the educational outcomes for D/HH students in Ireland, we only have to look across the water to be concerned. Chime pointed out to the Minister that the UK do publish data on educational

outcomes, and generally D/HH students there lag roughly one grade per subject behind their hearing peers. In addition to concerns about the number of teachers in Ireland with post graduate qualifications in Deaf Education, a further concern is that according to Chime analysis¹⁰: the ratio of Visiting Teachers (VT) for Children and Young People who are D/HH in Ireland is only at 60% of the number of VTs in England.¹² The VT service is widely recognised as a vital support to D/HH children, their parents and teachers.

While we know very little about how well D/HH students are doing in Ireland, all the indications are that they are not doing as well as they should. Publishing data on outcomes will be a first step towards benchmarking the current status of the education of D/HH students in Ireland.



The Visiting Teacher for D/HH in Ireland is operating at 60% of the capacity of the service in England.

¹⁰ The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland (NCSE, 2021).

¹¹ Note on Department for Education figures on attainment for Deaf children in 2021 (England). (NDCS, 2022).

¹² NCSE website: https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/23.03.2023_VTDHH_Contact-Details_NCSE-1.pdf and Education Provision for Deaf children in England 2020/21 (CRIDE, 2022).



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