



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais
National Disability Authority

Consultation on the Irish Sign Language Act 2017

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent state body providing expert advice on disability policy and practice to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and promoting Universal Design in Ireland.

The NDA have been asked by the Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to write a report about the operation of the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act 2017.

The Irish Sign Language Act was introduced in 2017 and public bodies and government departments were given three years to work on meeting the requirements of the Act. From December 2020, public bodies have to provide Deaf ISL signers with free interpretation when accessing services.

We are inviting you to submit your views and experiences of using public services through Irish Sign Language. Your submission will help us in writing the report on how well the Act is working for Deaf ISL signers.

This document is for written submissions. However, there are other ways to contribute to the consultations including through virtual public meetings, an on-line survey or through submitting an ISL video. Information on all the ways of becoming involved are available at www.nda.ie/isl

Submissions can be sent to the NDA by post or by email, by 26 March 2021. The fastest and most efficient method of making submissions is by way of email to the NDA at nda@nda.ie

Alternatively responses can be posted to the following address:

ISL Public Consultation
National Disability Authority
25 Clyde Road,
Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
D04 E409

If you are putting forward a submission on behalf of an organisation please include contact details for that organisation.

Implementation of the Irish Sign Language Act: Guiding Questions

We would like to learn about what your experience or the experiences of people you represent, has been in accessing public services through ISL. The NDA welcomes your responses to some or all of the following questions, which are there to help guide your responses. However, your feedback about what is important to you or those you represent does not have to fit within these questions, and there is room for open comment at the end.

Please note, NDA may use a quote or information from your submission in our report to give examples of where access to ISL has or has not worked well. This would be to highlight the experience of the ISL community and will not be linked to any individuals. No identifying information would be included

Also please note that written submissions are subject to 'Freedom of Information' requests which allow public access to government records. Please do not provide personal or confidential information unless it is necessary. More information on this is provided at the end.

Key questions

- I. What are your views on the implementation of the ISL Act to date, and the ability to access public services through ISL? What are the challenges? What improvements would you suggest? You can give an example if you would like. (suggested word limit 400 words).

There has been some progress in access to public services, e.g. via increased availability of remote interpreting (IRIS) and in getting interpreters for GP and hospital appointments. It was very helpful that the HSE extended access to interpreting for GP appointments to non-medical card holders.

However, for Deaf children, access to the school curriculum is still a major problem. There are many examples of Deaf students having to explain to their peers what the teacher said because their teachers do not have sufficient proficiency in ISL – even in Deaf schools! And where ISL interpretation is needed in class, the Dept of Education seeks to employ interpreters on the same scale as SNAs. The result is that these children do not have full access to the curriculum, as the posts do not attract suitably qualified people.

Also, the Department say that 'funding is provided' for a weekly home tuition service to support families to learn ISL. This 'service' has been beset with problems for many years, and despite many representations, the Department has done nothing. The 'service' is not fit for purpose, and could not be described as 'a scheme' as envisaged in the Act. For example, families must source the tutor themselves, there is no curriculum or quality assurance of the scheme, and the Department give the funding to the families which has resulted in tutors not being paid in a small number of instances.

2. Do you think any amendments to the scope and contents of the ISL Act are necessary or desirable? (Suggested word limit 400 words).

Part 5 of the Act should be amended to require the Minister for Education to put in place measures to ensure Deaf children have equal access to the school curriculum on a par with their hearing peers.

Where a Deaf child is in mainstream or is being taught by a teacher without the required proficiency in ISL, then ISL support must be provided by a person with the required competency in ISL to provide full access to the curriculum. The phrase 'access to the full curriculum' should be included in Section 5 (b) of the Act.

Section 5(d) of the Act should include provision for not just 'minimum qualifications of teachers, but also provisions for adequate ISL teacher training programmes to enable teachers to acquire the necessary proficiency in ISL to provide full access to the school curriculum.

Deaf people who secure employment continue to struggle in the workplace in terms of communication with management and fellow employees, and in terms of work progression, due to the lack of inwork communication supports. Chime believes that this is an area that should be included in the scope of the ISL Act.

It is somewhat bizarre that the State provides communication support for Deaf people to access employment (e.g. by providing a grant for an interpreter at a job interview), but no support if the person secures employment.

3. Do you think any additional provision needs to be made in relation to supports for children within the school system whose primary language is ISL? You can give an example if you would like. (Suggested word limit 400 words)

Yes. See points 1 and 2 above.

4. Please provide any further comments here (Suggested word limit 400 words)

The Minister for Education should ensure that an annual consultation is conducted with stakeholders involved in Deaf education to get feedback and suggestions, and to provide an update on the current status of provisions by the Department to support the education of children who communicate in ISL.

While such consultation is required by other legislation (e.g. UNCRPD, Disability Act), Chime is not aware that the Department engage in such consultation with stakeholders.

It is **NOT** necessary for you to complete this section giving your own name, and personal contact details (see below) if you do not wish to do so. If applicable, fill out your organisation's details. You also do not have to sign the form, but please do fill in the date for when you are making your submission

Name (optional)	Brendan Lennon
Name of Organisation	Chime
Organisation Type	Charity
Personal/Organisation's Address (optional)	35 North Frederick Street Dublin 1
Phone number (optional)	01 8175700
Email address	Brendan.lennon@chime.ie

Next steps after the end of the consultation period

What happens to your submission

Once the period for receiving submissions has ended, the NDA will review and analyse the responses. The main themes from this analysis will be included in the report on the operation of the Irish Sign Language Act, which will be provided to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The report will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas as required under the ISL Act.

Freedom of Information & Data Protection

The information collected from the submissions made through this consultation process will be subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act, 2018. Please note that all information and comments submitted to the National Disability Authority for the purpose of this consultation process are subject to release under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003.

If any of the detail you have provided us with is sensitive (on the basis that it is personal, confidential, or commercially confidential) please identify it here and give reasons why you think it should not be released. The NDA, where possible, will consult with you about any information which you have identified as sensitive information, before making a decision in response to a request for release under the Freedom of Information Acts. If you have any questions about this please contact the **NDA's Freedom of Information Officer**, at foi@nda.ie.

