

Irish Deaf Society



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Irish Deaf Society – The Irish Sign Language Recognition Campaign

Our contribution to FLAC submission for ICESCE hearing:

Despite a commitment in the 2011 *Programme for Government* to promote its recognition,¹ Irish Sign Language (ISL), the indigenous language used by the Deaf community in Ireland, is still not officially recognised.² There are an estimated 40,000 daily ISL users of which 5000 are Deaf people who have difficulty in accessing public services and information in correspondence with their rights and entitlements.³ Despite the clear recognition of native signed languages in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Ireland has not yet ratified, proposed legislation⁴ to officially recognise ISL was rejected by the Seanad (Senate) in January 2014. The Minister of State clarified that the Government did ‘not want to see scarce resources, particularly at this time of extremely scarce resources, used without the service being put in place’.⁵ Coupled with a complete funding cut to the IDS Deaf Advocacy Service in 2014, which was later reversed as a temporary measure,⁶ it is not clear how the State intends to progress this important issue and ensure the rights of the Deaf Community are protected and respected.

FLAC urges the Committee to recommend that the State:

- *Legislate to officially recognise Irish Sign Language.*

¹ Government of Ireland (2011) *Programme for Government 2011-2016*, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.24.

² Irish Deaf Society, ‘Irish Sign Language Recognition: Information Leaflet’, Dublin: IDS.

³ Irish Deaf Society, ‘Irish Sign Language Recognition: Information Leaflet’, Dublin: IDS.

⁴ Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2013.

⁵ Kathleen Lynch TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Older People, Equality & Mental Health, Seanad Debates: Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2013 – Second Stage, 22 January 2014.

⁶ Irish Deaf Society, ‘Irish Sign Language Awareness Week: ‘Strengthening Human Diversity’, [press release], 11 September 2014.

Our ideas of what ISL recognition can do for us, is reflected in the ISL Bill which can be seen at this link:

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/bills/2013/11313/b11313s.pdf>

We believe that our right to use ISL as our primary language can be intentionally or unintentionally violated on a daily basis. To understand this, there are two academic journal articles explain this stance: Please read Siegel (2006) and Mullane et al (2013) – Please see appendix 1 and 2

There have been a number of developments since September 2014 though they may not be significant but interesting enough to notice the moment. They are:

- 1) More county councils passed the motion calling on the government to recognise ISL. The wording of the motion which passed by many county councils are:
“In an effort to improve the lives and well - being of our deaf and hard of hearing citizens, that this Council calls on the Government to give official recognition status to ISL, Irish Sign Language”

As of 13.08.2015, the below box shows the list of councils that have passed the motion so far.

The following list of councils that have passed a motion calling on the Government to recognise Irish Sign Language:

<u>County Council</u>	<u>Borough Council</u>
<u>Cavan</u> County Council	<u>Clonmel</u> Borough Council
<u>Clare</u> County Council	<u>Drogheda</u> Borough Council
<u>Donegal</u> County Council	<u>Wexford</u> Borough Council
<u>Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown</u> County Council	
<u>Galway</u> County Council	<u>Town Council</u>
<u>Kerry</u> County Council	<u>Ardee</u> Town Council
<u>Kildare</u> County Council	<u>Athy</u> Town Council
<u>Kilkenny</u> County Council	<u>Bandon</u> Town Council
<u>Laois</u> County Council	<u>Carrickmarcross</u> Town Council
<u>Leitrim</u> County Council	<u>Clones</u> Town Council
<u>Limerick</u> County Council	<u>Cootehill</u> Town Council
<u>Longford</u> County Council	<u>Dundalk</u> Town Council
<u>Louth</u> County Council	<u>Killarney</u> Town Council
<u>Mayo</u> County Council	<u>Naas</u> Town Council
<u>Meath</u> County Council	<u>Tralee</u> Town Council
<u>Monaghan</u> County Council	<u>Trim</u> Town Council
<u>North Tipperary</u> County Council	
<u>Offaly</u> County Council	<u>City Council</u>
<u>Roscommon</u> County Council	<u>Cork</u> City Council
<u>Sligo</u> County Council	<u>Dublin</u> City Council
<u>South Dublin</u> County Council	<u>Galway</u> City Council
<u>Tipperary</u> Council Council	<u>Limerick</u> City Council
<u>Wexford</u> County Council	<u>Waterford</u> City Council
<u>Westmeath</u> County Council	A...
<u>Wicklow</u> County Council	

- 2) We submitted our suggestions to the National Disability Authority for consideration in the next National Disability Implementation Plan 2016-2018. We understand that the plan should be published by the government in July but there have been no movements to date. We have submitted our list of specific

- priorities for this plan and all these priorities are linked to the recognition of ISL.
- 3) Before this submission, we had a meeting with the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in November 2013. We listed a number of priorities; however the government has been slow in responding. Please see Appendix 3.
 - 4) We had an informal meeting with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission officials to explore what the commission can do for the recognition of ISL. While the commission officials are non-committal, they are sympathetic and supportive and agreed to consult with us during their incoming consultative process in terms of setting a list of priorities.
 - 5) As we understand the National Disability Authority is researching the possibility of creating a state-funded 'voucher system' which enables employers or Deaf workers to cover the cost of the interpretation (Irish Sign Language /English interpretation). This scheme would remove a barrier where employers see the employment of Deaf people as a burden hence a high unemployment rate among Deaf people. On the other hand, Deaf workers tend not to request such services out of fear of being seen as a burden on employers. This kind of scheme exists in several countries including Britain. In Finland, this kind of system extends beyond public services and employment so that Deaf people in Finland can avail of the scheme to cover access to cultural life also.
 - 6) The government recently replied to a parliamentary question, which could be linked to the issue above. (See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-03-24a.1034&s=Deaf#g1035.g>)
 - 7) The funding issues of summer 2014 for the 'Deaforward' Advocacy Service represent a challenge to the provision of, and access to services for Deaf people. Fintan O'Toole reported this in his column in the Irish Times on 31 March (<http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-the-crisis-is-over-so-when-does-the-cruelty-stop- 1.2159054>).

There are other various examples to which ISL recognition can contribute solutions in the following:

- 1) Deaf children are still not formally encouraged to learn ISL, and our concerns can be best described by the following statement by the World Federation of the Deaf and European Union of the Deaf when their representative gave to the UN panel in Geneva this week (see <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/DGD/2015/WFDAndEUD.doc>).
- 2) Advice given to parents of Deaf children still demonizing the ISL as if it brings harm to their children but research shows the contrary. It is clear that withholding ISL from children can bring harm to their subsequent cognitive and physical developments. Academics argue it is unethical to advise parents not to encourage sign language but it is widespread in this country. (See Humphries et al 2012)

- 3) Access to health services is still a haphazard experience for many ISL users...see the UK experience (<http://limpingchicken.com/2015/07/27/andy-palmer-can-we-really-crack-the-deaf-health-problem/>)...as well, Conama and Grehan (2001), as well, <http://www.medisignsproject.eu/MEDISIGNS/Research.html>
- 4) RTE decided to defer the only television programme that transmitted in ISL - 'Hands On' for one year. IDS protested against the decision and organised a petition (see the petition https://www.change.org/p/rt%C3%A9-raidi%C3%B3-teilif%C3%ADs-%C3%A9ireann-revert-the-cuts-to-hands-on-the-television-programme-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-community-in-ireland?recruiter=3334494&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=share_email_responsive)
- 5) The recent AHEAD (Association of Higher Education and Disability) report states that Deaf people are more likely to drop out of colleges and universities for the want of interpreters (see <http://www.thejournal.ie/less-deaf-people-college-1943320-Feb2015/>. And <http://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/free/PARTICIPATION%20RATES%20REPORT%202013-14.pdf>)
- 6) The recent case of the imprisonment of Edward Connors and lack of ISL services in prisons for Deaf prisoners. (See http://www.thejournal.ie/deaf-dawson-st-bus-death-1959030-Feb2015/?utm_source=shortlink)

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require further information or wish to meet us in person to discuss these things. The email address is islnow@irishdeafociety.ie