Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017:

**Technical Annex 1: Public Consultation**

December 2021



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# Acronyms

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease-2019 |
| ECCE | Early Childhood Care and Education  |
| ETB | Education and Training Board |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Regulation  |
| GP | General Practitioner |
| HSE | Heath Service Executive |
| IRIS | Irish Remote Interpreting Service  |
| ISL | Irish Sign Language |
| NCSE | National Council for Special Education |
| NDA | National Disability Authority |
| RISLI | Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters |
| RTÉ | Radio Teilifís Éireann |
| SENO | Special Educational Needs Organiser |
| SLIS | Sign Language Interpreting Service |
| SNA | Special Needs Assistant |
| TD | Teachta Dála |
| VT | Visiting Teacher |

# Introduction and Methods

This Technical Annex to the Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017, summarises feedback received during the 2021 NDA public consultation on the operation of the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act 2017 (the Act). Feedback will be presented based on each section of the Act, starting with the most widely applicable sections.

The NDA used a number of approaches to collect people’s perspectives on the current operation of the Act and in particular access to statutory entitlements and services provided by or under statute.

## ISL Act Reporting Advisory Group

The NDA established an ISL Act Reporting Advisory Group who provided advice and feedback on the public consultation process and survey questions, in addition to other work. The Reporting Advisory Group was made up of people from the following organisations:

* Irish Deaf Society
* National Deaf Women of Ireland
* Sharing the Journey
* Chime
* Kerry Deaf Resource Centre
* Centre for Deaf Studies at Trinity College Dublin
* Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters
* Sign Language Interpreting Service

## Public Consultation

The NDA consulted with members of the public during March and April 2021. A webpage was created on the NDA website that provided information about the consultation activities, including through ISL videos. The NDA used social media to promote public consultation surveys, events, and invitations for submissions, as well as directly emailing 33 organisations related to the deaf[[1]](#footnote-2) community, ISL and disability.

The public consultation comprised the following:

### Public meetings targeted at the ISL Community[[2]](#footnote-3)

The NDA hosted four two-hour online public meetings. Attendees were invited to share their views and experiences of accessing the provisions of the Act. One of the four meetings was advertised as being for parents and guardians of children who use ISL to share experiences of their child’s access to statutory entitlements and public services through ISL. One meeting was hosted in ISL, with all other meetings offering English/ISL interpretation. 76 people attended these meetings.

### Themed meetings with targeted invitations

The NDA hosted an additional three two-hour meetings on the themes of court services, broadcasting and education, respectively. The invitations for these meetings targeted individuals and organisations that may have experiences in these areas. 18 people in total attended these meetings. One of 15 invitees attended the court services meeting, two of five invitees attended the broadcasting meeting, and 15 of 27 invitees attended the education meeting. The education-themed meeting was attended by parents, principals, teachers and SNAs of deaf and hard of hearing children, interpreters who work in schools, researchers in deaf education and parent support groups.

### Public Surveys

Two online surveys on the operation of the Act were made available: one for the general public and one for parents and guardians of children who are ISL users which included specific questions on education. Each survey question was provided in both English and ISL.

There were 73 respondents to the general survey, almost three quarters of whom were deaf ISL signers (73%). The largest proportion of respondents were from Dublin (42.5%), followed by Cork (14%) and Meath (11%).

There were 60 respondents to the parents’ survey, with the majority being hearing parents with either basic ISL (40%), good ISL (37%) or no ISL (8%). The majority of respondents lived in either Dublin (37%) or Cork (37%). Almost half (45%) of responses related to children aged 5-11, 42% to children aged 12-18, and the remainder to children under 4 years of age.

Detailed information on each survey is provided in Appendix 1 and 2.

## Public Submissions

The NDA invited public submissions from individuals and organisations about the operation of the ISL Act. Submission format could be either written (in English) or video (in ISL). Submissions from children required parental consent to be included. Three video submissions and 18 written submissions were received. Of the written submissions, four were from organisations, and 14 from individuals.

## Public Consultation Limitations

The NDA notes the following limitations to the public consultation:

* There was no direct consultation with children. This was not possible due to time constraints on reporting, and schools being closed due to COVID-19 restrictions during the consultation period.
* The consultation did not include people who were not online. All consultation events were held online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore people who did not have digital access or skills were excluded, such as older people who are less likely to be digitally literate[[3]](#footnote-4).
* Some feedback may not have been provided due to confidentiality concerns. A small number of reports indicated that some people were reluctant to give feedback out of concern that they would be identifiable to service providers or others in the ISL community, due to the small size of the ISL community.
* Claims made in feedback about procedural issues or specific experiences have not been independently validated.
* In-depth investigation of specific sectors was not undertaken. Due to time constraints on reporting, the extent of consultation was limited to general input. This excluded comprehensive exploration of sectors such as health, education and justice.

# Section 6: Duty of Public Bodies

## Section 6(1)

### What the Act says

6. (1) A public body shall do all that is reasonable to ensure that interpretation into Irish Sign Language is provided for a person who is competent in that language and cannot hear or understand English or Irish when that person is seeking to avail of or access statutory entitlements or services provided by or under statute by that public body.

### Feedback from the public

A significant volume of feedback and information was gathered regarding access to services through ISL.

#### Definitions: “Shall do all that is reasonable”

Public feedback indicated that the definition of “all that is reasonable”is open to wide interpretation. Public comments included:

The attitude of the ISL provider is often “ah sure that doesn’t matter.”

Public feedback included a perception that cost is considered the major factor in whether interpretation is, or will be, provided by a public body. There were abundant examples of this provided, including public body staff refusing to provide interpreters, patients being told by nurses that they don’t care about the law (due to cost concerns), doctors providing interpretation at initial appointments but not in follow-up appointments, and people being told how many times they would be “allowed” an interpreter.

#### Definitions: “A person who is competent in that language and cannot hear or understand English or Irish”

Public feedback indicated that there is currently room for multiple interpretations of the definition of those that “cannot hear” or “cannot understand English or Irish,” sometimes to the detriment of ISL users. Public feedback included examples in which it is perceived that in some cases, any hearing or any comprehension of English may be counted against an individual in assessing their eligibility to access services through ISL.[[4]](#footnote-5) Feedback noted that in some quarters, service providers decide that lipreading or written English using a pen and paper is sufficient to provide access to the service, even in complex situations such as hospital appointments or counselling sessions.[[5]](#footnote-6)

#### Definitions: “When that person”

Public feedback indicated difficulty accessing services through ISL when it is needed in situations where two people use a service because one is dependent on the other. This includes, for example, situations involving a child and parent, or a person accompanied by a carer or guardian.

The need for ISL interpretation for deaf parents of hearing children was regularly mentioned, in situations such as where a parent has to meet their child’s school teacher and interpretation is not provided, potentially because the child is seen as the main person using the service. Some people gave examples of children being asked to interpret at parent-teacher meetings where the child’s behaviour, skills and abilities are being discussed. The example of carers was also raised, in relation to an adult accessing health services whose carer could not hear, and who wasn’t provided ISL interpretation.

Conversely, examples were also provided in which an ISL user was not perceived by staff to be accessing a service independently, and therefore was not offered ISL interpretation. Hearing parents reported regularly being asked to interpret for their children, rather than the child being seen as a service user in their own right and provided with interpretation, for example in health appointments.

#### Definitions: “Statutory entitlements or services provided by or under statute by that public body”

Feedback indicates that clarity for the public is lacking regarding what constitutes a “statutory entitlement or service provided by or under statute by that public body.” The most common comment from respondents to the parents’ survey in the open text section was regarding lack of clarity about what services are covered and with what entitlements, as well as comments regarding public bodies lack of awareness of same. Parents said:

While I am very happy that the ISL Act has been passed it would have been great to know what this meant, in reality, for my child

It is great that it is now a recognised language but it is not widely known or understood what is available or what we are entitled to.

An example was provided of an Education and Training Board (ETB) that refused to provide ISL interpretation for a person to attend a course. The ETB did not consider that the course came under the ISL Act, however this was not clear to the applicant.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Public feedback also indicated that it is “almost impossible” to get interpretation for the types of ancillary supports provided by state-funded ‘voluntary’ bodies such as residential addiction services, Pieta House, National Council for the Blind Ireland (NCBI), and local support groups for cancer patients. Public feedback also points to difficulty accessing ISL interpretation at domestic violence refuges. Some public feedback proposed amendment to the wording of this clause of the Act to require ISL responsibilities for both statutory and voluntary services that are provided with Exchequer funds.

### Implementation of Section 6(1): Overview

Public feedback indicated an appreciation for the limited increase in ISL access experienced, and noted the positive effect of ISL being seen regularly on television as a result of its inclusion in COVID-19 briefings. Comments included that while change was limited, it should be acknowledged that overall awareness within the public sector has improved and attitudes to ISL are changing for the better. A third (33%) of respondents to the public survey indicated that access to services through ISL had increased in the last three years, however this was not reflected in the parents survey, for whom 5% considered that access to services had increased. Survey respondents were most likely to state that there has been no change to access through ISL in the last three years (44% of the general survey, and 48% of the parents’ survey). Detailed information on survey respondents’ perception of changes in access is in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Public and parents perceived change in access to public services through ISL since 2017**

| **Response** | **Public survey (%)** | **Parent survey (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ISL access has increased | 33 | 5 |
| No different | 44 | 48 |
| ISL access has reduced | 5 | 2 |
| Don’t know or not applicable | 18 | 45 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

Source: NDA public surveys 2021

Nevertheless, access to public services was rated as ‘good’ by just 7% of respondents to the public survey, and 3% of respondents to the parents’ survey. Detailed information on the ratings provided in each survey is at Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Public and parents rating of access to public services through ISL**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Response**  | **Public survey (%)** | **Parent survey (%)** |
| Good | 7 | 3 |
| Poor | 18 | 40 |
| Varied a lot between services | 25 | 5 |
| Needed improvement | 20 | 13 |
| Did not answer the question | 25 | 7 |
| Not applicable | 5 | 32 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

Source: NDA public surveys 2021

The figures from Table 1 and Table 2 together indicate a landscape in which even for those who perceive an improvement in access, this improvement is still generally insufficient to rate access to services through ISL as ‘good.’ Almost a third (32%) of respondents to the public survey indicated that at least one request they had made for ISL interpretation to access a public service had been refused.

In terms of comments on the Act from each public survey, the most regular comments from the general survey were that there is no improvement, or that the Act is not working, and comments related to public bodies’ lack of awareness of the ISL Act or dismissal of the need for ISL. Public submissions and public meetings raised similar issues. Typical comments on these topics included that:

…none of the public services are aware of it [the ISL Act].

Most public bodies have done little or nothing to develop policies, procedures and funding

…access to justice, education, healthcare and information has not improved in any significant way.

From the public’s perspective, the most common challenge to accessing public services through ISL, reported by 64% of respondents to the public survey, was that

staff did not appear to understand their responsibility to provide access to their service through ISL.

Comments from stakeholder organisations who interact with a range of services suggested that some limited progress has occurred, with improvements in getting interpreters for GP and hospital appointments. They welcomed the extension of free ISL interpretation to all deaf people for GP and primary care appointments by the HSE for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other feedback from organisations noted a varying understanding of implementation by public bodies, and that implementation of the Act varies according to the public body, with some proactively seeking to improve their approach and others making very little change. These organisations noted that for public bodies that were already proactive, the ISL Act has increased understanding and respect, while for those that are less proactive, there has been very little change in service provision and awareness.

Common themes from the public consultation relating to specific concerns with delivery of service through ISL included:

#### Determination of the need for ISL access

Public and stakeholder organisation feedback suggested that the approach of public body staff in many cases lacked adequate understanding of need and responsibility for ISL service provision. Examples reported range from public bodies not considering or offering interpretation even when its absence seriously impacted service quality, to communication needs being minimised, to having requests for ISL being either kindly or rudely dismissed. Feedback suggested ISL interpretation is almost never proactively offered by services even when the need is known.

Several comments noted that even when requested, in some cases ISL interpretation was only provided when an outside organisation such as SLIS became involved and restated the need, or that staff sometimes gave the impression they “can’t be bothered” to arrange interpreting. Public feedback indicated that there appeared to be a perception by some public bodies that ISL interpretation is in some way an indulgence, rather than a necessity for both the public body and the ISL user to ensure the service is delivered to an appropriate standard.

Many examples were provided of instances in which staff of public bodies at both professional and administrative levels with no experience of ISL, determined whether or when ISL access was needed, with the ISL user having very little say in this. In one example a staff member determined that a student should use assistive technology rather than interpretation even when told that the assistive technology doesn’t work for that individual.

Public comments also noted the limited awareness among public body staff of the status of ISL as a full language, and of the substandard nature of services delivered without meaningful communication in its absence. Some considered that this contributed to problems with willingness to arrange interpretation. One comment noted that

Most people are more aware of Lámh [a simple communication system] and tend to think Deaf people use it too, not aware of the fact it…is not a language like ISL is. Doctors and nurses in professional settings have no idea about ISL. Even in audiology clinics they have no idea. I've been in hospital several times in the past year and all the health professionals I dealt with had no idea [except one].[[7]](#footnote-8)

#### Procedures for Organising Access

Over half (51%) of respondents to the public survey indicated that staff in public bodies did not appear to understand how to go about organising access to their services through ISL. Organisational stakeholders pointed to particular difficulties in this area related to agencies that are large, intricate, complex or offer a wide range of services. Specific agencies named in this context were HSE, County Councils, Department of Social Protection, Court Services, Tusla, Intreo, An Garda Síochána, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), Citizens Information Centres (CIC) and Legal Aid. Stakeholder organisations noted the need for such complex and diverse organisations to develop clear policies and procedures for request and approval of interpretation, and for these to be easily identifiable to both staff and ISL service users. Concerns were also raised about staff awareness and consistency in procedures for bodies in urban compared to rural areas, with comments such as:

I don’t see any improvement outside Dublin.

Public feedback from ISL users also reflected dissatisfaction with public bodies relying on written English for parts of service interactions, such as the public body expecting that ISL interpretation should be requested in English. Comments included:

The ISL Act is interpreted as only for ISL users that are also oral [can speak] and/or those with a good command of English

and that services instead:

must cater to those who ONLY use ISL, not relying on English as part of the process.

#### Choice of Interpreters

Public feedback repeatedly raised the importance of ISL users being able to have a say in who was booked to interpret for them due to the personal nature of the relationship with an interpreter. The risk of ISL users finding it challenging to engage with vital services if provided with the ‘wrong’ interpreter was raised. For example, children can be more affected by trust issues and may prefer a known interpreter. In relation to sensitive medical and justice services where anonymity is preferred people may refuse to interact rather than communicate through an interpreter that is part of their extended friendship and family circle. Some feedback pointed to the current process used by SLIS as good practice, in which users are asked for a list of their preferred interpreters. An additional comment raised on this topic was also in relation to appropriate allocation of interpreters based on gender and culture, with a male interpreter reporting being asked to interpret for a Muslim woman in a gynaecology ward, which was perceived as inappropriate. Stakeholder organisations noted that any consideration of ISL users’ interpreter preferences should not eclipse the need to ensure that quality remains the guiding force and that interpreters are appropriately qualified for the setting in which they are interpreting.

#### Quality of Interpreters

Public feedback suggested that the quality of interpreters used by public bodies was an ongoing issue. Many instances were discussed of public bodies cancelling accredited interpreters in favour of cheaper and lesser quality services, of using staff with minimal levels of ISL, and of suggesting ISL users bring family members along to interpret. Specific mention was also made of public bodies that hold existing contracts with spoken language interpretation agencies, and of the poorer quality of ISL interpretation provided by these agencies.

#### GDPR

Public feedback indicated that a consistent barrier to access to services through ISL was public bodies’ interpretation of the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as it relates to interpreters. Many examples were raised of situations with a range of public bodies in which GDPR was cited as a reason that the interpreter could not interact with the service provider on the ISL user’s behalf.

#### Complaints Procedures

Public feedback pointed out repeatedly that complaints procedures were mainly not accessible in ISL, either to make or to pursue a complaint, and that these are needed. Feedback further noted that where an individual personally arranged an interpreter to make a complaint in English about ISL access, the experience was that these were not satisfactorily resolved “regardless of where they’re made to, including the Ombudsman.” The public noted that failures in implementation of the ISL Act to the standard established in the legislation are not easily addressed by ISL users due to the imbalance in access to resources, funds and legal advice between an individual whose primary language is ISL and a larger system or organisation such as HSE, RTÉ, Office of Public Works etc.

#### Compliance

Feedback from organisational stakeholders and the public suggests frustration with the lack of implementation of the ISL Act. Feedback suggested both supportive measures (such as standard procedures) and punitive approaches (such as fines) for public bodies to improve implementation of ISL responsibilities.

### Implementation of Section 6(1): Key Sectors

Key sectors that attracted public feedback about ISL access were health, justice, media/culture, politics, early childhood care, and education. Feedback on primary education is discussed in relation to Section 5. Feedback highlighted the following.

#### Health

Respondents to the public survey listed a number of public services that had organised free ISL interpretation for them since 2017. Health-related services were the most commonly cited. Over one in four (42.5%) respondents indicated receiving free ISL interpretation in hospitals, 5% in mental health services, and 4% at GPs. Another 4% referred to ISL interpretation from Health Service Executive (HSE) or an HSE health centre.

Public feedback gave examples of barriers to accessing health services through ISL such as requests for interpretation being ignored or refused, no proactive identification of a patient’s need for interpretation, and lack of appropriate protocol for decisions on providing interpretation. There were also reports of poor assistance for access from Access Officers who were busy with other roles, and poor complaints mechanisms for addressing refusal of an interpreter. Some people reported that the amount of interpretation allocated was insufficient to the need, or that poorly qualified interpreters or family/ children were used to interpret. In terms of hospitals, some comments indicated that while access through ISL to outpatient services in some locations has improved, inpatient stays are “still highly problematic” and that it is “not unusual for Deaf patients to be in hospital for extended periods of time (e.g. a week or more) including post-operatively, without having interpreting access.” Health-related services delivered by state funded third parties are considered “extremely difficult” to access through ISL.

While health services provided ISL interpreting there was a view that ISL interpretation was perceived as a cost to be avoided where possible. Feedback also pointed to lack of understanding and awareness of the need for ISL and limited consistency in the delivery, or awareness, of the supports that are available.

The following limited number of examples demonstrates the range of experiences discussed in public feedback on access to health services through ISL.

* A deaf person was asked how staff should best communicate with them in recovery from surgery. The patient suggested an interpreter. This was then refused “point blank” by the doctor. The patient was in considerable pain after the operation but no interpretation was provided for several days.
* A deaf person was left in pain and hungry after fasting for longer than necessary, due to communication difficulties.
* A deaf person was in hospital unexpectedly with a terminal illness for the last few months of their life with no ISL interpreting provided and interpretation was only sought the day before they died.
* In relation to mental health services, public feedback reported that it is not uncommon that medical staff fail to understand the need for interpretation, and criticise patients overtly or subtly for not attending group activities with no interpreter, or expect patients to accept services at a standard far below what hearing people would receive such as trying to do counselling through writing. People related having deaf family members in residential mental health services who have no interpretation access apart from 1.5 hours twice a week for the designated consultations with the doctor. This was reported to result in a high level of frustration for patients in already precarious mental health, due to the inability to resolve even minor issues with nursing staff in the absence of interpretation.
* People have been refused interpreters and instead been provided with health service staff who have basic fingerspelling[[8]](#footnote-9) (spelling out words letter by letter) or told to bring a family member. It was also reported that it is not uncommon for staff who use ISL, or staff with basic ISL skills to be brought in to interpret.
* An older deaf person had major surgery, and while an interpreter was provided, the interpreter was questioned on arrival as to whether they were paid or a volunteer. When it was clear that the interpreter was paid the interpreter was advised that two other staff members would be arriving to give information to the patient while the interpreter was available. After about an hour of information provision the patient became drowsy and started to sleep, however the nurse wished for the session to continue.
* A respondent to the public consultation also reported that hospital services such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy “don’t look for interpreting support even when assessing patients,” and that awareness was poor among medical staff that interpretation can be sought, and that Access Officers can be consulted for advice.

#### Justice

Comments from the public consultations were that there is “very poor access to policing for the deaf in Ireland” and that there are members of the deaf community who have matters to report but have never had any link to the Gardaí. However, there were also comments noting that there have been a lot of improvements over the years.

Public consultation included comments that experience with the Gardaí was not positive with regard to follow up conversations after reporting a crime or taking of witness statements. Gardaí were reported as being unsure what to do when communicating with the ISL user, and some frontline staff lacking familiarity with processes to interact with ISL users. In terms of ISL users that are victims of crime, public feedback suggests that deaf victims of crime rarely get professional interpreters and are “often dealt with by unqualified interpreters” or use family members to interpret.

In terms of ISL users charged with a crime, feedback raised cases in which ISL users had not been able to avail of adequate interpretation while in the custody of An Garda Síochána. Examples were given of people being handcuffed and therefore unable to explain that they were deaf and needed ISL interpretation, and people arrested who felt pressured to sign English documents they didn’t really understand in the absence of someone to interpret them. Deaf people were reported as sometimes arriving in court and not knowing what they were charged with as a result of lack of interpretation while in custody. Reference was also made to some cases which were thrown out of court due to lack of sufficient ISL interpretation for the defendant in custody.

In relation to access to prison services through ISL, public feedback suggested that there “…really isn’t much” ISL interpretation provision for prisoners to take courses while in prison in the way that hearing prisoners do. Comments included that “…deaf people generally are doing absolutely nothing in there.” The process of seeking public feedback on the ISL Act was limited in its ability to identify or contact deaf prisoners directly to understand more about these concerns.

#### Heritage and Social and Cultural Events

Public comments included disappointment at the lack of ISL interpretation provided for access to public events, particularly where events related to important historical and cultural celebrations. Frustration was also noted in relation to the limited access to information and tours for public heritage monuments and public cultural institutions. ISL users suggested that in some cases it may be appropriate to use pre-recorded tours similar to the sign language tours available at galleries and museums overseas. Some types of experiences and venues were perceived to offer access to a shared sense of Irish identity, a rightful inheritance of Irish history, and an ability to feel more of a part of the wider cultural community. Feedback noted that ISL access for events for all ages was important and lacking in many cases, and suggested that ISL access should be standard for large or televised events.

#### Local and state politics

Public feedback expressed frustration at the inability to participate in political life through ISL. There was frustration at the inability to access interpretation to meet and discuss issues with one’s local Teachtaí Dála (TD), inability to access meetings of local government councils and inability to access information on the debates undertaken in the Houses of the Oireachtas except for Leader’s Questions. An example from one participant indicated that Dublin City Council had passed a motion for interpreters to be provided for all public meetings and places where decisions are made but noted that implementation of this motion was “incredibly slow.”

#### Early Childhood

There are currently no public services that fall under the remit of the ISL Act in relation to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). This gap was of concern to members of the public who made statements in relation to early childhood care such as “no deaf child will get the appropriate ISL support under the current arrangement.”

There are some ISL supports available through the Access and Inclusion Model programme (AIM).[[9]](#footnote-10) Parents report the process for accessing AIM supports for ISL is difficult as parents must find the person to provide the ISL supports, and the pay rate is very low resulting in children either having not having support for all of the week or having supports without appropriate ISL qualifications. Parents recommended that the ISL language supports for ECCE be recognised as a separate support and funded at a professional rate to ensure the child has support from a qualified and experienced ISL support worker and can therefore fully participate in ECCE.

#### Third Level Education

Public feedback indicated that access to ISL interpreters for higher education was good. Consultation participants requested that ISL funding be protected and increased to reflect any increase in student numbers. They also requested ISL training for lecturers and access officers to enable better communication between ISL users and staff. There was some criticism of the lack of access to courses conducted through ISL only, and absence of course materials in ISL. It was noted that most courses, including those at the Centre for Deaf Studies, rely on the ability to read and write English, which does not fully provide access to the service through ISL and excludes those who are not bilingual.

## Section 6(2)

### What the Act says

6. (2) The provision of interpretation shall be at no cost to the person concerned

### Feedback from the public

Just over one in ten (11%) of respondents to the public survey specified public bodies which had required them to pay for ISL interpretation in the last 3 years. Some organisational stakeholders noted that the issue of payment is a “persistent” area of confusion, with public bodies “often” demonstrating lack of awareness about their responsibility to cover interpreting costs. Comments included that

There is a widespread assumption across public bodies that the responsibility and costs of the interpreter is borne by deaf services or the deaf ISL user. There is very little evidence of awareness that the costs should be covered by the relevant Government body.

## Section 6(3)(a)

### What the Act says

6. (3) The Minister may by regulations –

(a) provide that where a person intends to avail of Irish Sign Language services provided by a public body, the person shall give the public body such prior notification of his or her intention within such period as specified in the regulations

### Feedback from the public

No notice period has been established through Regulations. Public feedback did not mention any preferences related to notice periods, however 34% of respondents to the public survey indicated that the time it was going to take for the service to be provided through ISL was too long.

## Section 6(3)(b)

### What the Act says

6. (3) The Minister may by regulations –

(b) provide for the procedure in relation to the provision of such services by a public body.

### Feedback from the public

No procedures have been established through regulations. Public feedback suggested that ISL users would like to see “clear policies, procedures and funding in place for the request, approval and sanctioning of interpreter access.”

## Section 6(4)

### What the Act says

6. (4) Provision of or availing of a remote, web-based service shall, if the Irish Sign Language user consents, be sufficient to meet the obligations of a public body under this section.

### Feedback from the public

There was minimal comment on the use of remote or web-based services by the public. Public feedback in relation to courts suggested that remote ISL interpretation is not a viable option for court interpretation, and pointed to research which investigated this matter and came to this conclusion.[[10]](#footnote-11)

## Section 6(5)

### What the Act says

6. (5) The Minister may prescribe as a public body such other person, body, organisation or group financed wholly or partly out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas (being a person, body, organisation or group that, in the opinion of the Minister, ought, in the public interest and having regard to the provisions and intentions of this Act, to be so prescribed).

### Feedback from the public

No additional entities have been prescribed as public bodies to date. The NDA received substantial feedback through public consultation regarding the difficulties ISL users had in accessing their statutory entitlements in hospitals and schools. Public feedback particularly queried whether bodies funded under Section 38 and 39[[11]](#footnote-12) of the Health Act 2004, as well as bodies such as Employability, Rehabcare and National Learning Networks were covered under the Act. Access issues were also raised in relation to voluntary and non-government organisations including those providing services for addiction, rehabilitation, suicide prevention, home supports, employment access and more.

# Section 7: Engagement of verified competent Irish Sign Language Interpreters

## What the Act says

7. A court or a public body, in compliance with its obligations under this Act, shall not engage the services of a person providing Irish Sign Language interpretation unless the person’s competence has been verified by having been accredited in accordance with an accreditation scheme funded by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

## Feedback from the public

The accreditation scheme for ISL interpreters was established in December 2020, under the name Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI).[[12]](#footnote-13) Respondents noted that in relation to the RISLI, possession of minimum qualifications may not indicate competence in all cases or in all circumstances. This point was particularly noted in relation to new graduates and in complex or specialised interpretation assignments such as those in medical and legal sectors.

Public and organisational stakeholder feedback indicated widespread and common examples where public bodies did not aim to ensure the competence of the ISL interpreter provided. After the establishment of the accreditation scheme in December 2020, this included not providing accredited interpreters. These examples include where:

* children are asked to interpret for parents
* parents are asked to interpret for children
* people are told to bring a family member to interpret
* qualified interpreters are sent away in favour of those with limited ISL to save on costs
* judges require bystanders that are ISL users to interpret in court without investigating their competence
* educational supports provided to children for interpretation are accepted with skills based on an evening course in ISL

It should be noted in relation to these examples that the use of hearing children of deaf adults to provide ISL interpretation was mentioned as a common occurrence, and strong feelings were voiced that this is considered inappropriate regardless of the age of the child. In one case, a child was interpreting for a deaf adult in a medical situation, and learnt of the terminal diagnosis of the parent at the same time as interpreting for the parent. Others mentioned children being asked to interpret content and concepts that were inappropriate for the child’s age and emotional maturity.

Where public bodies held contracts with spoken-language interpreting agencies for a wide range of interpretation services, public feedback raised problems associated with interpretation quality from these agencies in a number of contexts. It was suggested that unlike ISL-specific interpreting agencies, they do not check ISL qualifications of interpreters. Some interpreters reported never being asked about ISL qualifications prior to being offered work by such agencies.

### Supply of Interpreters

A number of issues in relation to inadequate interpreter supply are noted from public feedback. Feedback suggested that provision of ISL as an examinable language subject in school would open the door to interpretation as a career for existing ISL users and others, as well as increasing the number of ISL interpreters for whom ISL is their native language. The impact of current working conditions, such as perceived inadequate pay and job security, on the supply of interpreters is also noted from public feedback.

Public feedback expressed concern about the responsible allocation of interpreters in relation to the limited supply, noting that a public body might provide an interpreter for an event launch even though no ISL users are in attendance but will not book one for an appointment. Further to this, some noted that the current government method of employing interpreters (on a job-by-job basis) was expensive and inefficient given the undersupply of interpreters, and suggested that it would be better for government to employ some full time interpreters and deploy them across public bodies as needed.

# Section 4: Use of Irish Sign Language in Legal Proceedings

## What the Act says

4. (1) A person may use Irish Sign Language in, or in pleading in, any court

(2) Every court has, in any proceedings before it, the duty to do all that is reasonable to ensure that any person competent in Irish Sign Language and who cannot hear or understand English or Irish appearing in or giving evidence before it may be heard in that language, if that is his or her choice, and that in being so heard the person will not be placed at any disadvantage.

(3) For the purposes of ensuring that no person is placed at a disadvantage as aforesaid, the court may cause such facilities to be made available, as it considers appropriate, for the simultaneous or consecutive interpretation of proceedings into Irish Sign Language.

## Feedback from the public

Almost one in five (18%) of respondents to the public survey had been involved in legal proceedings where they had to attend court in the last three years. Although this number of individuals is small (13), only 15% rated the overall experience of accessing court services through ISL as excellent or good, 31% rated it okay, and 38% rated it as poor or very poor. The remainder did not select a rating.

Feedback from the ISL community indicates that free ISL interpretation has been consistently provided in the criminal courts, however not consistently in other courts. Comments suggests that the Family Court acts in good faith and provide interpreters for almost all proceedings, however there have been issues with ISL provision in the High Courts.

Consultation suggested that while the courts generally ensure that each party is provided with their own interpreter as is considered best practice, this does not happen in all courts. Examples were given of cases where parties attend court, discover an interpreter is needed and then adjourn the case, or where one party organises an interpreter and the other does not, so one interpreter interprets for both parties in order to avoid the case being adjourned.

There were some reports from the ISL community of being placed at a disadvantage in court as a result of the direction of the judge in criminal cases. In one example regarding a case with two co-accused individuals, the judge asked the hearing co-accused to interpret for the deaf co-accused. In a number of other examples, participants at the consultations reported that hearing ISL users who were incidentally present in the court have been asked by the judge to interpret with no warning, and threatened with contempt of court if they refused to do so.

Another potential source of disadvantage as a result of being heard in ISL was raised in relation to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The quality of interpretation is optimised when the interpreter can see the details of the case ahead of time, but in many cases courts had not allowed interpreters to access this information due to GDPR. Interpreters also reported that where the content or evidence in a case was traumatic, and interpreters have had no warning of this, it can affect the equilibrium of interpreters as they process emotional shock while interpreting.

In relation to the Coroner’s court, public feedback suggests that some members of the public have been unable to be heard through ISL in this Court. An example was provided in which sufficient notice of the need for an ISL interpreter was given, however an interpreter was not provided, creating difficulties for the ISL user in asking and responding to questions in the court. The individual had confirmed two weeks prior that an interpreter would be provided, but was then informed that it was not possible due to a limit on the number of people in the courtroom to ten, due to Covid-19 restrictions. On arrival, there were only five people in the courtroom. This example occurred in the context of an inquest into the death of an immediate family member so absence of ISL interpretation was distressing at a sensitive time. The distress was compounded by the absence of the means to make a complaint in ISL.

# Section 5: Educational supports for deaf children

## Section 5(a)

### What the Act says

5. The Minister for Education and Skills shall—

(a) establish a scheme for the provision of Irish Sign Language classes to—

(i) the parents, siblings and grandparents of a child who is deaf, and

(ii) other persons who serve in *locoparenti*s or as a guardian to a child who is deaf,

### About the ISL Tuition Scheme

Comments in relation to Section 5(a) refer to the ISL Tuition scheme administered by the Department of Education. The ISL Tuition scheme provides a grant from the Department of Education to the parent of a deaf child. This funding is for weekly ISL tuition to the child, their siblings, parents/guardians and grandparents, through a tutor visiting the child’s home. The maximum amount of tuition funded is 104 hours per year, which is provided as one hour per week for 44 weeks of the year, and 7.5 hours per week for the eight weeks of summer. The grant is payable from the time the child is diagnosed as being deaf until the end of post-primary education, and the grant must be applied for annually.

To access the grant the parent/guardian of the deaf/ hard of hearing child submits an application form to the Department of Education. The parent arranges to gather signatures each year for the parts of the application form that must be completed by the School Principal, the Visiting Teacher and the ISL Tutor. Parents are paid the grant funding and then are responsible for paying the ISL Tutor if this person is not already employed with the Department. Tutors must be vetted by the National Vetting Bureau before providing tuition. Parents must request the vetting disclosure from the tutor. Travel allowances for the tutor are not included in the funding.

### Feedback from the public: ISL Tuition scheme

The survey of parents of deaf/ hard of hearing children indicated that just under four in ten rated the ISL Tuition Scheme overall as excellent or good (38%, n=23), one quarter thought it was ‘ok’ (25%, n=15) and just over one fifth thought it was very poor or poor (22%, n=13). Comments on the ISL Tuition Scheme were extensive during consultations and a number of strong concerns regarding access, quality and outcomes were raised. Stakeholder organisations identified serious concerns, stating that it is “not fit for purpose,” is not “a scheme as envisaged by the ISL Act,” and that a new scheme should be introduced. Stakeholder organisations state that representations to the Department have been made regarding problems with the scheme. Comments by educational professionals highlighted the importance of this scheme, noting examples where siblings can be unable to communicate with each other without shared ISL skills.

Feedback suggested that operational issues with the current scheme have a negative impact on access to, and outcomes for, the scheme. These concerns included:

#### Scope

Feedback included criticism that current tuition, with one tutor and one timeslot, doesn’t support the diversity of approach needed to teach ISL to hearing family members as a second language in contrast to the approach needed to teach a deaf child their first and primary language. Other comments suggested confusion as to the scope of the scheme, with some suggesting that the current tuition arrangements should include parents, or asking where the classes for parents are, despite the current scheme being intended to include classes for parents.

#### Awareness

Almost all (92%) of respondents to the parents’ survey indicated that they were aware of the ISL Tuition scheme. Eight percent were not aware of the scheme. Eight percent of respondents to the parents’ survey referred to the need for more promotion of the scheme and information on how to access it, with suggestions including providing a leaflet to parents, and providing information in ISL for deaf parents.

Concern about the role of medical professionals in providing information to parents about ISL was also raised. A parent reported asking a medical professional about learning ISL when the child was diagnosed as deaf, and being advised that it wouldn’t be needed because “Cochlear implants are so successful [x] won’t need to sign”. The parent was only told of the ISL Tuition scheme one year later when it was clear that the implants would not be as successful as expected. Parents felt that children are missing out on language development in the first year because parents are not informed of the ISL Tuition scheme, or of the benefits of using signs to a baby’s cognitive development.

#### Application process

Almost two thirds (62%) of respondents to the parents’ survey indicated that the scheme was easy to apply for. However, difficulties were raised concerning the need for support organisations to assist parents with completing the paperwork, frustration at the requirement to reapply annually and at the time-consuming process of parents collecting multiple signatures. One comment noted that:

The process each year to apply is ridiculous, each year the forms are not available until start of the school week, yet it takes weeks to get all the signatures etc, if you use last year’s form to get a head start it is rejected, even if content is not different....a huge waste of time.

#### Accessing and paying Tutors

The two most common responses to the survey question as to how the scheme could be improved were to improve the payment system, and to have a central database or list of tutors. Accessing a tutor was the aspect of the scheme reported as most difficult, with 52% of respondents to the parent survey saying it is not easy to find a tutor. Tutors for the ISL Tuition scheme are identified by the parent in consultation with the designated Visiting Teacher, using the Visiting Teacher’s local networks to identify potential tutors. This can be a slow process, with stakeholder organisations stating that “it can take months to find one by word of mouth.” Parents also noted that Visiting Teachers’ caseload is heavy and they don’t always have time to help source tutors or help families. Respondents to the parent’s survey who didn’t access the ISL Tuition scheme, indicated that the main reason was lack of tutors or difficulty finding a tutor.

Feedback from former ISL tutors indicates that the payment process and remuneration offered to tutors are significant causes of people leaving this field of employment. The payment process of providing a grant to parents who then pay the tutor, can result in non-payment of tutors. The remuneration offered to tutors is considered to be low and in addition doesn’t include costs for travel to individual family homes. As one previous tutor stated:

I stopped it because I wasn’t getting paid by families. And the money…is a pittance.

Although only a small number of consultation participants were tutors, the payment process, and specifically lack of direct payment from the Department, was their main concern. A significant proportion of respondents to the parents’ survey also reported difficulties with administering payments. Almost a third (29%) said it is not easy to manage, 31% said it was somewhat easy to manage, and 40% said it is easy to manage. One parent commented

Pay the tutors directly - it’s hard having to manage the payments. It can be embarrassing when the payments are delayed arriving into my bank.

#### Accessing hours

Public comments suggested that the tuition hours provided are insufficient to learn ISL to a high level, for parents to reinforce the language at home, to keep up with their child’s ISL, and to be able to have an adult conversation with their child as the child matures.

Concerns were also raised around the loss of ISL learning due to inability to have hours back-paid in the scheme, such as where a family has been unable to find a tutor, or been unaware of the scheme.

#### Tutor Qualifications

Tutors for the scheme are not required to have specific qualifications in ISL or in teaching. Feedback reported dissatisfaction with the current system of using unqualified tutors and pointed to the need for ISL qualifications for tutors. Some also felt that the tutor should have teaching experience or qualifications.

#### ISL Curricula and assessment

The ISL Tuition scheme has no set curriculum to guide the instruction delivered by tutors. Feedback indicated a desire for more structure to the learning, to ensure that the learning is efficient and to a good standard. Many responses and submissions, including comments by Visiting Teachers, referred to the need for a curriculum to structure learning in the ISL Tuition scheme. One submission noted that this should include two separate curricula: one for child and one for the family; and noted that there are several examples of this in other jurisdictions.

Comments from organisations and the public also indicated concerns about the lack of quality assurance in the ISL Tuition scheme, including elements such as assessment of learners’ progress. Comments expressed dissatisfaction with the ISL Tuition scheme, particularly with the lack of goals and clear purpose such as having no target level of proficiency.

## Section 5(b)

### What the Act says

The Minister for Education and Skills shall—

(b) pending the conclusion of the review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme which the National Council for Special Education is undertaking and the implementation of any recommendations arising from the review, establish a scheme to provide Irish Sign Language support for children attending recognised schools (within the meaning of the Education Act 1998) whose primary language is Irish Sign Language,

There is no scheme in relation to Section 5(b). The most common response to the parents’ survey regarding additional provisions that need to be made for a child in the school system related to the need for communication through fluent ISL via interpreters, a communication assistant or an ISL Assistant (25%).

### Feedback from the public: Current ISL supports in schools

The current ISL supports for children in recognised schools includes Teachers, ISL Communication Support Workers and Special Needs Assistants (SNA’s).[[13]](#footnote-14) The topic of access to education for children whose primary language is ISL generated consistently negative feedback from parents, members of the ISL community, stakeholder organisations and the limited number of education sector staff that contributed to the public consultations. Feedback from organisational stakeholders included comments that access to the curriculum is a “major problem” and that:

Many parents have raised concerns regarding their child’s access to education through ISL. Parents of children in mainstream classes, special classes and special schools all report the challenges they have faced in trying to assert their child’s right to access education through ISL.

Less than four in 10 parents reported that their child currently had full access to the school curriculum through ISL (38%). Almost three quarters (72%) of respondents to the parents’ survey described the main challenge to accessing education through ISL as being that ISL is not adequately available in mainstream schools.

While many parents reported warm and supportive relationships with school staff (of various school types), both parents and sector staff pointed to trouble accessing adequate ISL supports for children through NCSE/Department of Education systems. Typical comments from parents referred to having to ‘take on a second job’ in advocating for their children, to ‘take on’ the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and the system, and to justify why their child needs ISL support to access their education. Concerns included failure to appropriately assess the child’s need, allocation of insufficient supports, lack of ISL fluency in the support staff offered, a resulting lack of access to the curriculum, and the perception of an adversarial process to access supports.

Feedback on the current ISL support types is summarised individually by type below.

#### Teachers (General)

Public feedback indicated concern for children’s language development and access to the curriculum as a result of inconsistent or inadequate teacher qualifications in ISL. One quarter of respondents to the parents’ survey reported that their child had a teacher with fluent ISL. Comments included that children are learning incorrect ISL due to the limited ISL skills in teachers, that teachers have basic ISL and are mixing it up with a simplistic communication system called Lámh (which is not a language), and that teachers are using Lámh with children as it is quicker and easier for the teacher to learn than ISL but is leading to confusion and frustration in the children. Public consultation participants noted that it is not uncommon for deaf children to interpret what the teacher is saying for their deaf peers due to the teacher’s lack of ISL fluency. Participants suggested that ISL fluency should be mandatory for teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children, and particularly so for teachers in deaf schools and deaf units, noting that teachers with no ISL are teaching in deaf schools and deaf units.

One parent referred to the problems for their child resulting from poor or varied levels of ISL in teachers noting that this was

causing tremendous frustration, tiredness from having to lipread most classes, de-motivating and extremely damaging to their self worth.

One attendee at a public meeting noted that their recent 2020 research with a small sample of teachers in mainstream schools indicates that teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing in these contexts mostly “focused on the medical model and assistive technology, refusing to use ISL in the classroom” and had “little to no access to ISL courses”. This researcher found that most teachers interviewed “lacked knowledge of sign language and picked up signs from searching online (Google) or from the child themselves.”[[14]](#footnote-15)

Teachers that provided feedback through the public consultation process indicated that despite their strong interest in improving their ISL skills, this was constrained by an inability to access training, particularly outside of Dublin. Teachers further commented that as a result of their inability to access higher levels of training to improve their own ISL skills, they felt unable to assist their ISL students to keep progressing their ISL in the way that they could for their English speaking students who continued to study English until they could reach a college standard. Teachers suggested access to a central online hub of courses which could be accessed by any teacher or SNA anywhere, at any time throughout the year, would help address this issue, noting that this is provided in the education sector in other jurisdictions.

#### Visiting Teachers (VTs)

**About VTs**: VTs provide support to children, families and schools through advice, information and recommendations regarding the education and communication needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as assessing and recording the child’s progress in attainment of targets. The current minimum qualification for VT roles is a teaching qualification. Each VT is responsible for a particular region and caseload of students.[[15]](#footnote-16) Support from a VT is provided from the date a referral is made until the end of post-primary education. The frequency of visits to schools or parents by the VT, and the type of support they provide is based on individual need.

**Feedback about VTs**: Many comments from schools and the public indicated that support from their VT was excellent. However, in relation to ISL, public feedback criticised the lack of ISL skills in VTs, noting that in many cases, VTs are unable to communicate with the deaf children they work with. Public feedback sought minimum qualifications in ISL for VTs working with deaf children. The public comments also suggested that VTs are largely not specialists in deaf education, but instead are teachers employed on a temporary secondment basis. Public comments sought minimum qualifications in deaf education for these roles.

#### ISL Communication Support Worker

**About ISL Communication Support Workers**: The ISL Communication Support Worker is noted in ministerial statements as being an interim support provided pending the establishment of a scheme under Section 5(b). This role is allocated by the Department of Education to an individual school to provide ISL communication support to a single child for the full duration of each school day. There is no minimum ISL qualification for ISL Communication Support Workers. The process of allocating an ISL Communication Support Worker is that it is only used in cases where current processes in relation to the SNA scheme have been exhausted. In that case the school, in conjunction with the VT and SENO, identify that there is a significant need. The allocation of a role is approved by the Department of Education following engagement between the NCSE and the Department. The role is then allocated and employed on the same terms and conditions as SNAs. There are currently six ISL Communication Support Workers employed.

**Feedback about ISL Communication Support Workers**: There is no public information or awareness about the ISL Communication Support Worker role. The lack of awareness is apparent as public feedback included comments saying that nothing has been done about creating the Communication Support Worker role since the 2018 SNA Review, or that the Communication Support Worker role should be created. As a result of this confusion, public feedback on this role was not always easy to differentiate from feedback regarding standard SNAs, but the NDA understands it is allocated by NCSE and the Department of Education after other supports are exhausted, and the duties of the role are allocated to full-time ISL interpretation for one child.

Significant concerns about this role were raised regarding qualifications, the process of allocation and the impact of remuneration on the quality of the service.

##### Allocation

The process of allocation of the ISL Communication Support Worker generated high levels of distress in parents and families, who felt they had to ‘fight’ for appropriate language access. Parents’ perception was that access to an ISL Communication Support Worker for children whose primary language is ISL is extremely difficult to achieve and dependent on the competence and motivation of parents to proactively advocate for the allocation of further supports beyond the default allocation of an SNA or partial access to an SNA. Parents commented that they felt concerned for other parents of deaf children that lacked the capacity to undertake this advocacy, as the default supports for primary ISL users in schools were considered inadequate, and the likelihood of Communication Support Worker allocation without parental advocacy was considered small.

Allocation issues raised included an example in which a profoundly deaf child whose primary language was ISL, with no meaningful English skills, was about to enter mainstream school for the first time.[[16]](#footnote-17) The child was not allocated an ISL Communication Support Worker in a school that had no ISL skills among existing staff and there was limited time to develop these skills prior to the start of the school year. The school, with the support of the VT, followed the appropriate process and applied to the NCSE for allocation of a dedicated SNA, including expert references verifying this need. The application was refused, and the local SENO instead recommended the child use a partial share of the existing SNA at the school as per the existing policy[[17]](#footnote-18) that the school is responsible for upskilling its SNAs in ISL. As there was insufficient time prior to the start of the school year to seek formal review of the decision through the school, the parent, with the support of the school, then personally contacted the SENO and requested further supports for the child. When the response to this did not change, the parent contacted the NCSE area manager to again seek further supports for the child. The NCSE and Department of Education then granted the ISL Communication Support Worker to the school. The parent had not presented new information in advocating for further supports, but they were granted once the request had been escalated.

Parents and organisation representatives commented that the policy of schools being responsible for the ISL upskilling of their SNAs does not adequately address the skills gap, and considered that ISL upskilling expectations for existing staff are unrealistic to achieve the required level of ISL fluency. It was noted several times that achieving fluency in a language requires hundreds of hours of study. Parents also noted that the process for allocation of a Communication Support Worker is lengthy and negatively impacts on the child’s learning due to lost time while they await allocation of adequate supports.

##### Qualifications

There is no minimum ISL qualification for ISL Communication Support Workers. Public feedback criticised the quality of interpretation provided and suggested a strong preference for qualifications and independent assessment of competence in these roles. Public comments included

There is an absolute need for someone with fluent ISL to be present with the child otherwise there is no possibility of the child being able to access the curriculum.

Public feedback also criticised the methods of determining ISL competence the Department currently uses, noting that:

* advertisement and recruitment processes for the role do not prioritise those with higher ISL qualifications or accreditation even where it is available
* the roles are not paid at a rate sufficient to attract or retain those that are adequately qualified in ISL
* the alternative methods to determine competence are not independently and transparently assessed

##### Remuneration

The payment rates for ISL Communication Support Workers are at an hourly rate of €13.55.[[18]](#footnote-19) Public feedback indicates that the remuneration of ISL Communication Support Workers is a significant reason why roles are filled by those perceived as having inadequate ISL skills, and also contribute to staff turnover in the role.

An example was given of a university-qualified individual taking on the Communication Support Worker role due to a personal relationship with a child. Parents reported that the individual eventually moved on as a result of their own financial needs. This caused great distress for the parent due to the low likelihood that a similarly qualified fluent ISL user will take up the role for the wage offered, and concern for the subsequent impact on the child’s access to the curriculum, language development and peer connections.

#### Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

**About SNAs**: An SNA is a support staff role allocated annually by the NCSE to schools, to support teachers through assisting with the care needs of students with disabilities. This role is widely used to support students with various disabilities to access education. In this context, an SNA might be allocated to provide support to a deaf child with ISL as part of addressing a range of care support needs for several children with disabilities at a particular school.[[19]](#footnote-20) The current recommended level of SNA support for a deaf or hard of hearing child is a partial allocation of the SNA’s time.[[20]](#footnote-21) SNAs for children whose primary language is ISL are allocated with an expectation that the SNA will assist the child to access the curriculum and interact with their peers through ISL and that the school will upskill the SNA in ISL to ensure this support is adequate.

**Feedback about SNAs**: Public feedback on the SNA role was extensive and largely negative regarding the role’s ability to provide for the needs of children whose primary language is ISL. The employment of ISL Communication Support Workers under SNA terms made it difficult to always accurately differentiate feedback on each of these roles. For this reason, some aspects of feedback on SNAs echoes points raised in relation to the ISL Communication Support Worker.

##### Allocation

Allocation of SNAs as a shared resource that a child may only have partial access to was raised as a concern in public consultation. Feedback from parents and others stated that the limited SNA hours were inadequate to enable the child to access the curriculum and communicate fully with peers and others in the school environment, as they would have no ability to communicate without the SNA present. Stakeholder organisations suggest that this level of allocation is related to a perception of ISL as a care need, rather than a language in its own right, without which a child is isolated from meaningful communication. Public feedback suggested that children whose primary language is ISL should get SNA support on a full-time basis per child as a standard approach.

In addition, public feedback raised concerns about the role of assistive technology in the decisions about ISL supports for children whose primary language is ISL, with a perception that having a cochlear implant would count against a child receiving adequate support in their primary language.

##### Qualifications

SNAs supporting children whose primary language is ISL are not required to have ISL qualifications. ISL competence in SNAs is instead addressed through recruitment based on a level of competence, or through upskilling of existing SNAs via courses. Less than a quarter (22%) of respondents to the parent’s survey indicated that their child’s SNA had fluent ISL.

Public consultation reported an example in which a child was supported throughout school by an SNA who had only done an evening course in ISL. In fifth year (i.e. when the child was approximately 16 years of age), a qualified interpreter began work as their language support, and quickly realised that the child did not understand what was being translated, had not understood the basics of the curriculum for years and had been missing out on lunchtime conversations with peers for the same amount of time. Others noted examples where a child is taught in a signed language other than ISL, such as signed English or Sign Supported English (SSE),[[21]](#footnote-22) noting that in some cases it can be three or four years before parents realise that their child is not being taught through ISL. Parents suggested monitoring of ISL quality in SNAs is needed due to lack of ISL qualifications in SNAs.

Some public comments suggested that lack of SNA ISL skills also inhibited language development in the child as a result of the absence of a fluent language model. Teachers of ISL short courses criticised the approach in which individuals whose only exposure to ISL has been through a short evening course are considered adequate in these circumstances, and the lack of independent assessment of SNA ISL competence by fluent ISL users. Public feedback and submissions, including from children, suggested that ISL competence in SNAs was inadequate to provide access to the curriculum. Parents reported their child having to teach the SNA ISL. Lack of access to the curriculum through ISL was a source of great distress to parents and children in relation to the future of the child. Public submissions on this matter included children pleading for fluent, qualified ISL interpreters to access their education, saying:

All I need is a full proper interpreter so I can have access to my education in primary and secondary school, then I will have a good future. I do not want to struggle and feel lost and not have a good job because I haven’t been able to learn. I really just need an interpreter, a full proper interpreter. Please, that’s all, please, please, please. [translation from ISL video submission to English]

Overwhelming public feedback suggested that a standardised high level of ISL qualification is desired in SNAs that provide ISL for children whose primary language is ISL in order to ensure their full access to curriculum and language development.

##### Remuneration

The remuneration of SNAs was raised in feedback as a significant cause of roles being filled by those with perceived inadequate ISL skills, and of staff turnover in the role. Schools commented on experiencing difficulty retaining adequately ISL-qualified staff due to the low pay, and in one case the school staff experienced high levels of stress regarding how a child would continue to communicate and learn, as a result of inability to recruit anyone with sufficient ISL at the pay rate offered, despite advertising three times.

Where public feedback indicated serious problems with the child’s ability to learn using the existing SNA’s ISL skills, the low pay of the position was considered the direct cause of this problem as a result of its inability to attract and retain staff with high-level ISL qualifications. Multiple examples indicated that where a child had been lucky to get an SNA with university-level qualifications, this person inevitably moved on as a result of the low pay. At this point the family and the child experienced stress due to the inadequate ISL skills in the new SNA.

#### Feedback on suggested further ISL supports in schools

The need for a clearer purpose to section 5(b) was raised in feedback from stakeholder organisations, who sought an amendment to the Act to state that the scheme should ensure deaf children have equal “access to the full school curriculum” on a par with their hearing peers. Public feedback sought access to the curriculum through ISL, improved access to learning ISL as a language for children whose primary language is ISL and improved peer ISL education to address social isolation, including in special schools, schools for the deaf and deaf units.

Public feedback strongly and consistently raised the need to provide children whose primary language is ISL with improved access to ISL as an independent subject at school. Public feedback suggested that ISL as a subject is currently provided at primary but not secondary school level, and the number of hours it is provided at primary level was considered inadequate. Participants in the consultations recommended that a standard curriculum should urgently be developed for learning ISL from junior infants at primary school through to secondary school where it should be provided as a junior and leaving certificate examined subject. Feedback criticised the fact that ISL is not treated as a language subject in the same way as other languages, in terms of teaching grammar or language development similar to that provided for English or other spoken languages, and by teachers who have qualifications recognised by the Teaching Council.

Children of deaf adults also point to the lack of a curriculum for ISL as a subject as a contributor to the low number of ISL interpreters in Ireland, and the low number of interpreters who are native ISL speakers, due to hearing children whose first language is ISL not being enabled or encouraged to take up ISL interpretation as a career.

## Section 5(c)

### What the Act says

5. The Minister for Education and Skills shall—

(c) ensure there is established by institutions of higher education in the State, as part of programmes of teacher education and training provided by those institutions, such provision, as he or she deems necessary, to ensure that there are a sufficient number of educational placements offering Irish Sign Language training for teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are attending recognised schools, and

### Feedback from the public

This clause of the ISL Act has not been implemented. During the public consultation, teachers reported their desire to learn more ISL but expressed concern about the lack of available ISL training courses at the standard required to help their students progress in ISL in the way their English students could in English.

## Section 5(d)

### What the Act says

5. The Minister for Education and Skills shall—

(d) shall, where practicable and having regard to the need to ensure the provision of education and support services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are attending recognised schools, determine, from time to time, minimum qualifications of teachers of those children.

### Feedback from the public

No minimum qualifications have been determined for these roles. Public feedback suggested that ISL fluency should be mandatory for teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children, and particularly so for teachers in deaf schools and deaf units.

# Section 8: Broadcasting Principles

## What the Act says

8. Broadcasters (within the meaning of the Broadcasting Act 2009) in fulfilling their obligations in relation to Irish Sign Language targets and requirements in respect of programmes transmitted on a broadcasting service (within the meaning of that Act) provided by the broadcaster as set out in the broadcasting rules made under section 43 (1)(c) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland shall adhere to principles of equality, dignity and respect in terms of the promotion and broadcasting of such programmes.

## Feedback from the public

Public feedback on ISL broadcasting provided a range of feedback regarding what would be considered access that provided equality, dignity and respect. This included comments such as that far more than the limited news time of approximately two minutes per day is required for ISL users to understand basic current and political affairs in Ireland and combat misinformation. Also that programming with ISL should be provided at reasonable hours to improve access and that this should be at regular, predictable times to support those with cognitive decline or with limited access to the changing schedule information that is often only provided in English or online. Comments also included a desire for ISL complaints methods as well as information promoted in ISL on how to make a complaint. Reference was made to situations in which some ISL users with limited English struggle to find how to make a complaint when the complaint information is only in English.

Public feedback regularly voiced strong opposition to programmes with ISL being largely in “the middle of the night”, and further pointed out the inability of older people with cognitive decline or limited technical skills to access any of this content if expected to have the skills to record and replay it. Feedback also noted that broadcasted programmes with ISL are often repeated programmes rather than new content. Other concerns were raised by the public and stakeholders regarding the poor quality of ISL interpretation sometimes used in programmes with ISL.

The presentation of ISL interpreters on screen was also mentioned, for example criticism of camera crews zooming in on presenters or framing views in such a way that an interpreter that is present is cut out of the shot. Public and stakeholder feedback also strongly supported the return of a regular programme for ISL users presented by ISL users as a desirable support for community understanding and cohesion.[[22]](#footnote-23) Public feedback further noted the particular importance and power of broadcasting for ISL users in connecting people to culture and community.

Feedback also noted recent examples of ISL interpretation used in television programmes, in which the interpreters were not trained or used a combination of ISL and British Sign Language. This relates not just to Section 8 of the Act but also to the right to preserve ISL under Section 3. The negative effects of broadcasting on the preservation of ISL were considered to be a particular concern given the relatively small number of ISL users and the subsequent relatively large impact on its preservation. As one respondent noted:

What you’re seeing is a dilution of Irish Sign Language.

While feedback from the ISL community noted that ISL is a constantly evolving language, like any other, these examples were seen as a negative impact on ISL preservation and development because they resulted from inadequate language quality standards in those employed to use the language. Public comments focused on lack of monitoring as the cause of interpretation quality concerns. Comments included:

Broadcasting is a very powerful medium, if presenters are seen to be signing what people think is ISL … that needs to be monitored, there is no monitoring.

# Section 9: Support for Access to events, services and activities for users of Irish Sign Language

## What the Act says

9. (1) The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection may, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas, provide funds to facilitate users of Irish Sign Language with regard to support in relation to access to social, educational and cultural events and services (including medical) and other activities by such users as specified in guidelines made by that Minister of the Government.

(2) Guidelines under this section shall specify the events, services and activities to which the guidelines apply and shall make provision regarding the management and delivery of the support in relation to access to those events, services or activities by users of Irish Sign Language.

## Feedback from the public

There is no funding currently provided to ISL users under Section 9. Public feedback showed great enthusiasm for the ‘Voucher Scheme’ and its potential to open up opportunities for greater participation in public and cultural life for ISL users. Responses to the public survey indicated that 64% had missed out on social, educational and cultural activities due to a lack of ISL interpretation.

# Section 3: Recognition of Irish Sign Language

## What the Act says

3 .(1) The State recognises the right of Irish Sign Language users to use Irish Sign Language as their native language and the corresponding duty on all public bodies to provide Irish Sign Language users with free interpretation when availing of or seeking to access statutory entitlements and services.

(2) The community of persons using Irish Sign Language shall have the right to use, develop and preserve Irish Sign Language.

## Feedback from the public

Public consultation highlighted examples of negative impacts on the development and preservation of ISL. An example was provided where a fluent ISL user met a child whose primary language was ISL and who was using incorrect signs or a mix of spelling and signs due to learning this in a school environment where staff have limited ISL. The fluent ISL user commented:

The signs they used came from the school. It was so confusing because the signs they used were different. They should be using our ISL signs consistently like we do. [translation from ISL]

Feedback also noted recent examples of incorrect ISL interpretation used in television programmes, with comments highlighting that broadcasting is a powerful medium and ISL provision in this medium should be monitored. Feedback suggested that the current approach is resulting in the “dilution” of ISL. This is discussed further in relation to Section 8.

# Section 1: Interpretation

## What the Act says

1. In this Act—

“Irish Sign Language” means the sign language used by the majority of the deaf community in the State;

“Minister” means the Minister for Justice and Equality;

“prescribed” means prescribed by regulations made by the Minister;

“public body” means:

(a) a Department of State (other than, in relation to the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces) for which a Minister of the Government is responsible;

(b) a local authority within the meaning of the Local Government Act 2001 ;

(c) the Health Service Executive;

(d) a university or institute of technology;

(e) an education and training board established under section 9 of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 ;

(f) any other person, body or organisation established—

(i) by or under an enactment (other than the Companies Act 2014 ) or charter,

(ii) by any scheme administered by a Minister of the Government, or

(iii) under the Companies Act 2014 in pursuance of powers conferred by or under another enactment, and financed wholly or partly by means of money provided, or loans made or guaranteed, by a Minister of the Government or the issue of shares held by or on behalf of a Minister of the Government;

(g) a company (within the meaning of the Companies Act 2014) a majority of the shares in which are held by or on behalf of a Minister of the Government;

(h) any other person, body, organisation or group prescribed under section 6 (5).

## Feedback from the public

Feedback from the public indicated a lack of clarity on what public bodies the Act applied to. For example, one participant in the consultations mentioned that they were unsure whether Pobal was covered by the Act.

# Section 2: Regulations

## What the Act says

2. (1) The Minister may by regulations provide for any matter referred to in this Act as prescribed or to be prescribed.

2. (2) Every regulation made under this Act shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas as soon as may be after it is made and, if a resolution annulling the regulations is passed by either House within the next 21 days on which that House has sat after the regulation has been laid before it, the regulation shall be annulled accordingly but without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done thereunder.

## Feedback from the public

In relation to this Section, there have been no Regulations made under Section 2 of the ISL Act, and therefore no public feedback, but the NDA advises that some of the issues raised in relation to other sectors of activity could be addressed through the availability of Regulations to support implementation of the Act.

# Issues not Currently Covered by the Act

## Access to Private Services

Private services are not currently within the remit of the ISL Act, aside from where this may be covered through a Section 9 ‘Voucher scheme’. Public feedback indicated a desire for amendments to the ISL Act to include access to private services through ISL such as banks, insurance, opticians, hardware shops, churches, solicitors and services provided under private health insurance.

## Employment

ISL interpretation provided by employers for employees is not currently within the remit of the ISL Act. Consultation participants raised the need for provision of ISL interpretation for employees whose primary language is ISL. Comments highlighted that the absence of interpretation for employees can lead to unemployment, or suboptimal communication in the workplace, and can decrease motivation for ISL users to achieve academically if it appears that it will not be possible to get a job after completing education.

## Augmentative/Alternative ISL

ISL other than the visual, spatial ISL used by the majority of the deaf community in the state, [[23]](#footnote-24) is not currently within the scope of the ISL Act.[[24]](#footnote-25) Public feedback raised the need for consideration of the needs of deafblind individuals in the ISL Act. Consultation participants noted that many persons who are deafblind use augmentative/alternative ISL as their primary means of communication, and that many ISL interpreters are not confident or competent in using tactile ISL.[[25]](#footnote-26) Public feedback proposed amendments to the ISL Act to provide recognition for ISL “in all formats, including augmentative, tactile and alternative modes of communication,” the use of tactile signing in legal proceedings, and the inclusion of deafblind children in Section 5 of the Act related to education.

# Conclusion

Feedback from public consultation on the operation of the ISL Act was rich, and painted a picture of the challenges and exclusion experienced when ISL interpretation is not adequately provided. While some progress has been made, it is clear that there is much more to do. This consultation feedback technical annex supports the NDA’s report on the operation of the Act, which includes a series of recommendations for improvement.

Appendices

# Appendix 1: Analysis of Public Survey Responses

### Respondents

The general public survey was completed by 73 people. Almost three quarters of these respondents were deaf ISL signers (72.6%, n=53), 17.8% were family members or carers of an adult who is a deaf ISL signer (n=13), just over one in ten were ISL signers who were not deaf (12.3%, n=9) and 4.1% (n=3) recorded themselves as ‘other’ – this included a deaf person who is not an ISL signer, a teacher of the deaf, and a family member of a child who is a deaf ISL signer. Respondents could select multiple categories for this question.

The majority of respondents lived in Dublin (42.5%, n=31), 13.7% lived in Cork (n=10) and 11.0% lived in Meath (n=8). Around one in twenty respondents lived in Kerry (5.5%, n=4) or Kilkenny (5.5%, n=4). Just over four percent (4.1%, n=3) lived in Waterford, 3% (n=2) lived in Galway, and 3% (n=2) in Wexford (n=2). Nine other respondents came from nine other different counties.

### Experience in accessing public services through ISL

Three quarters of respondents (75.3%, n=55) were aware that public bodies are now obliged to facilitate access to their services through ISL, while 21.9% (n=16) were not (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Awareness that public bodies are obliged to facilitate access to services through ISL**

#### Number of public services used

Respondents reported using from zero to 20 public services in the previous three years, and on average needed to use four different public services. Respondents requested access through ISL to three public services on average in that time, with the number of services ranging between zero and 20.

#### Services that organised free ISL interpretation

Over half of respondents (56.2%, n=41) specified the services which organised free ISL interpretation for them in the past three years, with the most commonly reported service being a hospital (42.5%, n=31).

Just over 8% of respondents had free ISL interpretation organised for them in education related settings (8.2%, n=6,) including from the Department of Education, schools, school events, and an ETB. Almost 7% of respondents referred to free interpretation from a range of disability-related services and organisations including Rehab Care, St Michael’s House Ballymun, Chime, the Irish Deaf Society and NCBI (6.8%, n=5) and another 6.8% referred to free interpretation services from SLIS, IRIS and Bridge (n=5). Just over 5% referred to mental health services (5.5%, n=4), including CAMHS, Jigsaw, and a mental health community nurse. Just over 4% of respondents had free ISL interpretation organised by GPs (4.1%, n=3) and the same amount by the HSE or a HSE health centre. Two respondents were provided with free interpretation by the Public Appointments Service or Intreo, and a further two by Tusla or a social worker. Almost one in ten respondents named other services which had organised free ISL interpretation for them (9.6%, n=7). These included An Garda Síochána, Dáil Éireann, a funeral service, an optician, Revenue, RTÉ, a theatre.

#### Services that required ISL users to pay for interpretation

Respondents were asked which services had required them to organise and pay for ISL interpretation themselves in the past three years. Just over one in five respondents said that none had required them to do this (21.9%, n=16) and one said it happened rarely. Eleven percent of respondents specified particular public services which had required them to do this (11.0%, n=8), and 2.7% named private services (n=2). Named services included courts, a hospital, An Garda Síochána, courses, a school, GPs, dentists, religious services, a solicitor, and a private health clinic. Four respondents provided other responses such as that they were rarely asked to pay, that they were always responsible for getting the interpreter, that Covid-19 restrictions had cancelled events, and that interpretation is only free with a medical card (5.5%). The remaining respondents indicated that the question was not applicable (13.7%, n=10), or did not respond to the question (45.2%, n=33).

#### Rating of access to public services

Respondents rated access to public services through ISL based on their overall experiences (Table 1). Almost one quarter reported that access varies a lot depending on the service (24.7%, n=18), and just over one fifth thought it needs to be improved (20.5%, n=15). Almost 18% of respondents thought access to public services through ISL is poor (17.8%, n=13), while 6.8% thought it is good (n=5).

**Table 1. Rating of access to public services through ISL**

| **Response**  | **Number** | **%** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| It varies a lot depending on the service | 18 | 24.7 |
| I think it needs to be improved | 15 | 20.5 |
| I think it is poor | 13 | 17.8 |
| I think it is good | 5 | 6.8 |
| Not applicable | 4 | 5.5 |
| No response | 18 | 24.7 |

#### Change in access to public services

Respondents were asked if they had seen any change in access to public services through ISL since 2017 (Figure 2). Almost 44% of respondents reported that they had seen no difference in access since 2017 (43.8%, n=32). Conversely, almost one third of respondents felt access to public service through ISL had increased (32.9%, n=24), while 5.5% felt access had reduced (n=4).

**Figure 2. Perspectives on change in access to public services through ISL since 2017**

#### Challenges to accessing public services

Respondents were asked about the main challenges they experienced in accessing public services through ISL in the previous 3 years (Table 2). They could provide more than one response. Almost two thirds of respondents felt that staff did not appear to understand their responsibility to provide access to their service through ISL (64.4%, n=47), and just over half felt that staff did not appear to understand how to go about organising access to their service through ISL (50.7%, n=37). Just over a third of respondents reported that one of their main challenges was that the time it was going to take for the service to be provided through ISL was too long (34%, n=25).

Just over three in ten respondents had their request to access a service through ISL refused in the past three years (31.5%, n=23). Just over one fifth of respondents specified other challenges they had experienced (21.9%, n=16). These challenges included that the importance of interpretation was not recognised, that people were expected to get their own interpreter, that interpretation was refused as it was considered too expensive, that there was ad hoc use of other staff members who had ISL, provision was inconsistent, that the interpreter was not appropriately experienced for the service being accessed, interpreters not being booked or available for the time needed, having to book interpreters in advance, and a reliance on a parent to act as interpreter.

**Table 2. Main challenges experienced in accessing public services through ISL in the previous 3 years**

| **Response** | **Number**  | **%** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The staff did not appear to understand their responsibility to provide access to their service through ISL | 47 | 64.4 |
| The staff did not appear to understand how to go about organising access to their service through ISL | 37 | 50.7 |
| The time it was going to take for the service to be provided through ISL was too long | 25 | 34.2 |
| My request to access the service through ISL was refused | 23 | 31.5 |
| Other | 16 | 21.9 |
| Not applicable | 11 | 15.1 |

#### How to improve access to services through ISL

Respondents were asked about what public bodies could do to improve access to their public services through ISL. The most common theme mentioned by respondents was the need for awareness, education, and trainingfor public bodieson the responsibilities of public bodies, and for staff to understand how to contact, book, pay for and use an interpreter (17.8%, n=13). Almost one in ten respondents referred to the need for deaf awareness training for staff members and public bodies (9.6%, n=7). Just over 5% of respondents referred to the need for training in ISL – either for it to be available in schools or college, or that it should be part of training for specific jobs, including doctors, the Gardaí, bank staff, insurance staff, and healthcare assistants (5.5%, n=4). A further three people said ‘awareness’ or ‘awareness and training’ but without any other detail. Two people noted that more awareness was needed that the interpreter is there to serve both the deaf person and the service, not just the deaf person. One person referred to the barrier caused by a lack of awareness that ISL is a full language:

I have found public services have no problem understanding the need for a spoken language interpreter - Polish, Lithuanian, Brazilian etc but do not appear to understand it is the same for an ISL user.

Just over16% of respondents referred to specific services and events which needed to improve (16.4%, n=12).These included An Garda Síochána, GPs, HSE, Mental Health Services, Intreo, Social Welfare, Revenue, ETB, hospitals, visiting teachers, elections, conferences, ceremonies, public courts, tours, pantomimes, entertainments such as Disney ice shows, and children’s adventure shows. One person replied that anything which is publicly funded should provide ISL.

Eleven percent of respondents made recommendations and suggestions on the systems and structures for the availability of ISL interpreters (11.0%, n=8). Five of these respondents suggested public bodies should have ISL interpreters ‘on site’, with four specifically referring to having ISL interpreters on site in hospitals. Another respondent suggested a panel of full time or part time interpreters based in a central area, akin to substitute teachers in schools, while another suggested that there should be Disability Access officers available across the country. One respondent replied that more interpreters would improve access to public services through ISL.

Almost 14% percent of respondents referred to various ways that the process of accessing ISL interpretation could be improved (13.7%, n=10). Three of these referred to a more timely process, including the ability to access an interpreter at shorter notice. Other recommendations included a 24 hour service, more unified, easier access, the opportunity to discuss ISL interpreter preferences in advance and a system for confirming interpreters will be provided that does not put the onus on service users to follow up. One respondent replied that a complaints procedure is needed if ISL is not provided, and another suggested that there could be learning across departments between staff who have ISL user experience. Another respondent simply said that everything needed to be improved.

Just over 8% of respondents recommended that public bodies be proactive and automatically provide an ISL interpreter to those who need one, with a number suggesting that this could be facilitated by an indicator on a service users record to note that they communicate through ISL (8.2%, n=6).

Just over 8% of respondents suggested that public bodies should advertise or and promote the availability of ISL via a sticker or logo, on their websites and other platforms, and have their policies and procedures posted online and available to the public (8.2%, n=6). One respondent suggested promotion of ISL availability because it can be ‘very intimidating’ to ask about.

Almost 7% of respondents referred to the need for a clear system and guidelines for accessing and paying for interpreters (6.8%, n=5). These responses included the need for clear policies, procedures, and guidelines for staff on how to source and pay for an interpreter if requested.

Other suggestions mentioned by respondents were more accessible ISL information including videos, more access to employment, more information on transport and allowing families to stay with deaf patients in hospital if care assistants had no ISL.

### **Experience of accessing television programmes through** ISL

Just over eight in ten respondents watched TV programmes on Irish TV channels and websites (83.6%, n=61), while 13.7% did not (n=10). Two respondents did not answer this question. Respondents were asked whether they had seen any difference in the availability of ISL interpretation for TV programmes on Irish TV channels and their websites in the last three years (Figure 3). Over half of the respondents had seen more ISL interpretation (52.1%, n=38), 16.4% reported no difference (n=12) and 13.7% reported that they had seen less ISL interpretation on Irish TV and websites (n=10).

**Figure 3. Perspectives on difference in availability of ISL interpretation on Irish TV channels and websites in the last three years**

#### Challenges to accessing television programmes

Almost seven in ten respondents gave responses regarding the main challenges in accessing ISL interpretation for TV programmes on Irish TV channels and their websites (69.9%, n=51). The most common responses referred to a lack of ISL on television, including various channels, and players, as well as on programmes such as prime time, news and new shows.( 21.9%, n=16). The implications of this were explained by a number of respondents:

Almost no prime time programs have ISL interpreting. Most of these programs of interest with interpretation are on during the night - politics, documentaries etc. Nothing that we as a family can all sit together and watch and discuss

Another common response by around one in five respondents (19.2%, n=14) related to the timing when programmes with ISL interpretation were broadcast – with all referring to these programmes currently being broadcast at unsuitable times, namely late at night or early in the morning:

The main challenge is most ISL interpretations are shown at the most ridiculous hours when most of us would be in bed and have to get up for work the following morning.

Just over twelve percent of respondents (12.3%, n=9) gave suggestions on which channels and programmes should have ISL interpretation, with responses including all TV broadcasting, all Irish TV, channels and websites, RTÉ 1 and RTÉ 2 (not just RTÉ News Now), Oireachtas TV, the Late Late Show, with a number of respondents suggesting the news should always have ISL:

…live main news should have interpretation like BBC have.

Almost one in ten respondents referred to challenges with subtitles (9.6%, n=7). Subtitles are not within the scope of the ISL Act, which relates only to ISL. Almost 7% of respondents (6.8%, n=5) gave examples of where ISL is used on television, and these included HSE briefings, COVID-19 announcements, Taoiseach’s speeches, and the weather.

Just over 5% of respondents (5.5%, n=4) referred to challenges with the ISL interpretation provided. This included that some interpreters relay rather than translate into ISL which is difficult to follow, that the size of interpreter on the screen and the clarity of the picture of the interpreter was a challenge, and that the screen layout of making the programme smaller to fit the interpreter in should be changed to instead be able to switch the interpreter on and off like with subtitles.

Two respondents referred to “Hands On”, a show ‘by deaf people for deaf people’, with one referring to the disappointment of this show being cut, and another saying it should be brought back. Another two referred to technical challenges such as delays, RTÉ website crashing and HD quality. A further two respondents expressed satisfaction, with one saying they were happy with ISL and subtitle provision. Two respondents referred to the full ISL national anthem not being shown during GAA finals, with one referring to the #StopHidingISL campaign.

Almost 10% of respondents (9.6%, n=7) referred to other challenges or gave other comments on accessing ISL interpretation for TV programmes on Irish TV channels and their websites. This included comments regarding providers needing to be deaf aware and the importance of increasing awareness of the deaf community’s culture to the public, issues with lack of programming diversity from RTÉ and with watching RTÉ Now instead of RTÉ 1, and the news being too short.

### Participation in social, educational and cultural events, services and activities

Just over eight in ten respondents (83.6%, n=61) knew of specific government funds to support ISL users participation in social, educational and cultural events, services and activities, while 16.4% did not know of any such funds (n=12). Almost two thirds of respondents (64%, n=45) reported that they had missed out on social, educational or cultural services and activities because of lack of access through ISL, while just over one third had not missed out (34.2%, n=25) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Had respondents missed out on social, educational or cultural services or activities because of lack of ISL**



#### Challenges to accessing social, educational and cultural events, services, and activities

Over half of respondents gave insight into the main challenges in accessing social, educational and cultural events, services and activities through ISL (53.4%, n=39). The most common response related to payment of interpreters with respondents saying that funding was a challenge, that the government should fund ISL provision, that they couldn’t pay for interpreters themselves, or that they had been refused ISL due to the expense:

organising bodies, service providers, etc, say 'Interpreting is too expensive' 'we have no money for [interpreters]'

The next most common response related to a lack of awareness and knowledge by public bodies (12.3%, n=9) of the responsibility of bodies to provide ISL access, that ISL is a recognised state language, that people have rights to an interpreter, that interpreters are available, and a lack of awareness around seating/standing arrangements. On a related note, two respondents referred to the lack of and need for more ISL exposure.

Almost 7% of respondents referred to a lack of choice being a challenge, namely that there was a lack of choice when it came to day, time and date for ISL provision which might not suit when they want to attend an event/activity, and also that there is a limited choice of suitable events (6.8%, n=5).

The process of booking interpretation was raised as a challenge by 6.8% of respondents. One of the challenges here was not hearing back from event organisers or hearing back from them at the last minute, the ‘panic’ of organisations when ISL is requested and having to book ISL for a conference 4-5 months in advance. Another noted that there was no system in place. One respondent noted that repeated engagement with a particular body can improve the process, but that this requires effort on the part of the deaf person.

The challenge of knowing which events are supported by ISL was raised by 5.5% (n=4) of respondents. These comments referenced poor advertising by event holders, a lack of knowledge from event holders of the need to advertise well in advance, and the result being that people need to seek out this information themselves. Women’s Aid was named as one of few organisations who publicise their commitment to providing ISL services.

A further 5.5% (n=4)referred to challenges accessing ISL in particular areas, including events by disability organisations, cultural events, social events, and with one person saying they had less access to cultural and educational events.

Three respondents said that the main challenge was that ISL was not available (4.1%), while another three said there were not enough interpreters (4.1%):

Lack of fully qualified and trained interpreters especially in non-urban areas.

Just over12% of respondents listed other challenges or comments (12.3%, n=9). One person noted that they had experienced no challenges yet, while another answered that everything was a challenge, and another referred to it being very difficult. Other comments noted that lack of inclusion, independence and equality are challenges, that the quality of ISL can be poor, and that no ISL-related announcements are in ISL.

### Accessing court services through ISL

Almost 18% of respondents (17.8%, n=13) had been involved in legal proceedings where they had to attend court in the previous 3 years. Of these, almost half requested access to court services through ISL and were provided this free of charge (46.2%, n=6), while one respondent was given access but had to pay for the interpreter themselves. Just over three in ten of these respondents (30.8%, n=4) did not have any ISL interpretation in the legal proceedings. Two respondents noted that no interpreters were sought and another two reported that interpreters were not available on the day they attended court.

#### Rating of access to court services

Respondents were asked to rate their experience accessing court services through ISL (Figure 5). Just over 15% of these 13 respondents reported that their experience was excellent or good (15.4%, n=2), just over three in ten said that it was ok (30.8%, n=4) and 38.5% reported that their experience was poor (15.4%, n=2) or very poor (23.1%, n=3).

**Figure 5. Overall experience of accessing court services through ISL**

#### Pie chart which shows that most people rated their experience of accessing court services through ISL as either poor or very poor. Figures as per main text: 38.5% Poor/Very Poor; 30.8% Okay; 15.4% Excellent/GoodChallenges to accessing court services

Ten respondents provided information on the main challenges faced in accessing court services through ISL. The most common issue mentioned by five of these respondents was a lack of awareness or knowledge, specifically mentioning a lack of awareness by the judge, a lack of awareness of the client’s needs, and the assumption that parents or carers will interpret for the client. Three referred to issues with accessibility of and ability to understand written content, including legal documents, and that information resources should be available in ISL – for example, the courts website and the Citizen’s Information website. The remaining challenges were mentioned by one respondent each: misinformation, a lack of interpreters, wanting to request a preferred interpreter, the speed of proceedings in the court room meaning there is no time to seek clarification, often leaving the deaf client ‘bewildered’. Two respondents referred to needs in this area - needing separate interpreters for each deaf client and the need for more appropriately qualified/trained deaf professionals in the legal system as the interpreter can feel a responsibility to educate other professionals working with deaf service users. One respondent said that they had no challenge in accessing court services through ISL.

### Other comments about how well the ISL Act is working providing access to public services through ISL

Forty-nine respondents provided additional comments. The most common themes in these responses were that there has been no improvement or the Act is not working (18.3%, n=9) and responses related to public bodies lack of awareness of ISL, the ISL Act or dismissing the need for ISL (18.3%, n=9). Further themes were regarding the need for improvement in processes for organising interpreters and access to services through ISL (16.3%, n=8) and that public services need a better understanding of the ISL Act (8.2%, n=4). Other comments covered a range of topics including noting that there has been an improvement in ISL access and awareness in the public sector, the need to teach ISL in school, the need for a public awareness campaign about ISL as a recognised language, and the need for ISL interpretation in specific situations such as talking to TD’s, employment and private services.

# Appendix 2: Analysis of Parent Survey Responses

### Respondents

The survey for parents or guardians of deaf or hard of hearing children was completed by 60 people. Four in ten respondents were a hearing parent or guardian with very basic ISL (41.6%, n=25), and a similar proportion of 36.7% were a hearing parent or guardian with a good level of ISL (n=22). Just over 8% of respondents were a hearing parent or guardian with no ISL (8.3%, n=5), while 6.7% were a deaf parent or guardian who is a native ISL signer (n=4). One in twenty respondents were a hearing parent or guardian with fluent ISL (4.1%, n=3) and one was a deaf verbal parent with no ISL. The majority of respondents’ children were aged 5-11 (45.0%, n=27). Just over four in ten were aged 12-18 years old (41.7%, n=25), and just over one in ten were aged four and under (13.3%, n=8).

The majority of respondents lived in Dublin (36.7%, n=22) and Cork (36.7%, n=22). One in twenty lived in Tipperary (4.1%, n=3) and 3.3% lived in Wicklow (n=2). Eleven other respondents came from eleven other different counties.

### Experience in accessing public services for children through ISL

Just under half of respondents (45.0%, n=27) were aware that public bodies are now obliged to facilitate access to their services through ISL, while 55.0% (n=33) were not aware of this (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Parents’ awareness that public bodies are obliged to facilitate access to services for children through ISL**



#### Number of public services the child has used

Respondents’ children needed to use from zero to 60 public services in the previous 3 years, needing to use on average four different public services. Respondents requested access through ISL to one public service on average in that time, with the number of services ranging from zero to 15.

#### Services that organised free ISL interpretation for children

Twelve parents (20.0% of respondents) listed the services which organised free ISL interpretation for their children in the past three years. Just over one in ten (11.7%, n=7,) had received free ISL interpretation from the HSE (including specifically for CAMHS, Assessment of Need, dentist, GP and hospital). Five percent reported that they had received free ISL interpretation from hospitals (5.0%, n=3). One parent noted that a hospital had paid for ISL interpretation but required the parent to organise it. Seven respondents reported a further seven services which provided them with free ISL interpretation: the Arts Council, Chime, the Citizens Information Board, the Department of Education, the Road Safety Authority, a speech and language therapist and Tusla.

#### Services that required ISL users to pay for interpretation for children

Five parents (8.3% of all respondents) listed services that required them to organise and pay for ISL interpretation themselves. Four mentioned the HSE (including specifically for an Assessment of Need, Audiology and Dental services) (6.7%), another mentioned mental health and dental services and two respondents said the Department of Education required them to organise and pay for ISL themselves (3.3%).

#### Rating of access to public services for children

Respondents rated access to public services through ISL based on their overall experiences (Table 1). The most common response is that it was poor (40.0%, n=24), and just over one in ten reported that it needs to be improved (13.3%, n=8). Five percent reported that access varies a lot depending on the service (5.0%, n=3) and 3.3% thought it was good (n=2). This question was rated as not applicable by almost one third of respondents (31.7%, n=19) and four respondents did not answer this question.

**Table 1. Parents rating of access to public services through ISL for their child**

| **Response**  | **Number** | **%** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Overall I think it is poor | 24 | 40.0 |
| Overall I think it needs to be improved | 8 | 13.3 |
| It varies a lot depending on the service | 3 | 5.0 |
| Overall I think it is good | 2 | 3.3 |
| Not applicable | 19 | 31.7 |
| Missing | 4 | 6.7 |

#### Change in access to public services for children

Respondents were asked if they had seen any change in access to public services through ISL for their child since 2017 (Figure 2). Almost half of respondents reported that they had seen no difference in access since 2017 (48.3%, n=29). One in twenty respondents felt access to public service through ISL had increased (5.0%, n=3), while one respondent felt access had reduced (1.7%). Just over four in ten respondents responded that they either didn’t know or this question was not applicable to them (41.7%, n=25) and two respondents did not answer this question.

**Figure 2. Parents perspectives on change in access to public services through ISL for their child since 2017**

#### Challenges to accessing public services for children

Respondents were asked about the main challenges they experienced in accessing public services through ISL for their child in the previous three years (Table 2). They could provide more than one response. Almost one third of respondents felt that staff did not appear to understand their responsibility to provide access to their service through ISL (31.7%, n=19). Just over one fifth of respondents felt that staff did not appear to understand how to go about organising access to their service through ISL (21.7%, n=13). One fifth of respondents reported that one of their main challenges was that the time it was going to take for the service to be provided through ISL was too long (20.0%, n=12). Just over one in ten had their request to access a service through ISL refused in the past 3 years (11.7%, n=7).

Almost three in ten respondents specified other challenges they had experienced (28.3%, n=17). These challenges included a lack of awareness by staff about their responsibilities, procedures for organising interpreters, engaging with deaf children, and the importance of ISL interpretation for children for communication, education and engagement with peers. One parent noted a situation where interpretation was actively dismissed as something which would get in the way of an appointment. Other challenges were raised in relation to the Department of Education and access to the classroom in particular where there was no specialist therapist with ISL skills available anywhere, where ISL interpretation service is not promoted to parents, where a parent had to organise their own interpreter, and where a family attended an appointment only to find out the interpreter had been cancelled.

**Table 2. Main challenges experienced in accessing public services for children through ISL in the previous 3 years**

| **Response** | **Number** | **%** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The staff did not appear to understand their responsibility to provide access to their service through ISL for my child | 19 | 31.7 |
| I was not aware that it was possible for my child to access these services through ISL | 18 | 30.0 |
| The staff did not appear to understand how to go about organising access to their service through ISL for my child | 13 | 21.7 |
| The time it was going to take for the service to be provided for my child through ISL was too long | 12 | 20.0 |
| My request to access the service through ISL for my child was refused | 7 | 11.7 |
| Other | 17 | 28.3 |
| Not applicable | 18 | 30.0 |

#### How to improve access to services through ISL for children

Sixty-five percent of respondents gave suggestions on what public bodies could do to improve access to their public services through ISL (65.0%, n=39). The most common response was that ISL interpretation services should be advertised so that parents know about it (18.3%, n=11). The next most common suggestion (16.7%, n=10) related to awareness raising. This included awareness about public services’ obligations, on how services can access, book and pay for interpreters, deaf awareness and understanding the different communication needs of deaf people. It also included children’s rights, such that a young person might not want their family in the room to interpret, and the importance of ISL for children. It also included increasing awareness that ISL is an official language, and awareness that the interpreter is there to service both communities, not just the person who is deaf.

Over one in ten respondents gave suggestions for an interpreter system (11.7%, n=7). This included ideas such as on-site interpreters, staff with knowledge of ISL, having the number of interpreters available in an area aligned with the population of deaf people, and having more interpreters to improve access.

Just over 8% of respondents referred to the need for education and training in ISL (8.3%, n=5) to improve access for ISL users. Two suggested staff be trained in ISL, and other specified therapy staff be trained in ISL, while two referred to the need to have ISL taught in schools:

Start teaching simple ISL from primary school, (or as a starting point); Transition year in secondary school, and build on it from there to become a mainstream topic in secondary schools for the Junior and Leaving Cert program.

Just over 8% of respondents referred to various ways that the process of accessing ISL interpretation could be improved, including having easier access, having 24 hour access, having bodies held accountable for not adhering to their responsibilities, and having a contact list of interpreters (8.3%, n=5). Another respondent simply said that everything needed to be improved.

Almost 7% of respondents referred to simply having interpreters available when requested would improve the service for children (6.7%, n=4).

Five percent of parents suggested that services be proactive and ask parents whether an interpreter is needed (5.0%, n=3), while another 5% (n=3) suggested that services organise an interpreter automatically, for example by being notified by an indicator in a patient’s file which notes the need for ISL.

Five percent of parents mentioned the education system specifically, such as noting that the Department of Education are a key stakeholder, that access to education should be enabled, to create a role for a Communication Support Worker in the school system, that children should have access to an SNA full-time, and they should have access to both an SNA and an interpreter (5.0%, n=3).

Almost 17% of respondents gave other suggestions (16.7%, n=10) on how services could improve access to ISL for children. These included: treating ISL translation like any other language, improving attitudes and behaviour and treating the child like an individual. Other suggestions were to provide more accessible information, having an interactive ISL dictionary for staff, and having ISL translation technology.

### Experience of accessing children’s television programmes through ISL

Just over seven in 10 respondents reported that their child watched TV programmes on Irish TV channels and websites (73.3%, n=44), while 23.3% reported that they did not (n=14). Two respondents did not provide an answer for this question. Respondents were asked whether they had seen any difference in the availability of ISL interpretation for children’s TV programmes on Irish TV channels and their websites in the last three years (Figure 3). Forty percent reported seeing more ISL interpretation (40.0%, n=24), 30% reported no difference (30.0%, n=18) and 6.7% reported that they had seen less availability of ISL interpretation on Irish TV and websites (n=4) (Figure 3). Fifteen percent of respondents gave other responses and these included that not all channels used ISL, that children’s programmes did not have presenters using ISL, that there was too much finger spelling, and the ISL was mostly on the player rather than on main stations. Other respondents referred to their children using subtitles instead.. Just over 11% of respondents said this question was not applicable to them (11.7%, n=7) and three respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

**Figure 3. Perspectives on difference in availability of ISL interpretation for children’s TV on Irish TV channels and websites in the last three years**

#### Challenges to accessing television programmes for children

Just over half of respondents gave insight into the main challenges for children in accessing ISL interpretation for TV programmes on Irish TV channels and their websites (55.0%, n=33). The most common response was that ISL are not always available on children’s or TV programmes in general (23.3%, n=14). Almost 17% reported issues with ISL interpreted programmes(16.7%, n=10), with two referring to issues with fingerspelling, with one noting that the level of finger spelling and ISL was too advanced. Other answers included that ISL programmes are adult programmes, there are issues with timings, including that programmes are on late at night or require recording in the middle of the night, they are only repeats and particular programmes, and they are not available for live or original programmes:

The programs with ISL are of an adult nature and are only played very late at night. When there is access on a suitable program they have to watch after the event on an app or laptops not live with family.

One in ten parents mentioned the need for more ISL for children’s programmes (10.0%, n=6), for all children’s programmes, for cartoon channels, for younger age groups and for preschool children’s TV, and one would like to see more presenters using sign language.

Other comments included difficulties finding out when ISL programmes are scheduled the suggestion of an app to facilitate this, and that there are just not enough interpreters, while others mentioned the Late Late Toy Show and School Hub as shows using ISL.

### Department of Education’s ISL Tuition Scheme

The Department of Education’s ISL Tuition Scheme provides funding for a weekly tuition service whereby a tutor visits the home of a deaf or hard of hearing pre-school child or school-going pupil to provide training in ISL for the child, their siblings, parents or guardians and grandparents. Just over nine in ten participants were aware of this scheme (91.7%, n=55), while 8.3% were not aware (n=5). Two thirds of respondents had availed of the ISL Tuition Scheme (66.7%, n=40), 13.3% had not (n=8), and 5% arranged ISL tuition elsewhere (n=3). Eight respondents didn’t answer this question.

**Figure4. Uptake of the ISL Tuition Scheme**

One fifth of respondents gave reasons for why they didn’t avail of the ISL Tuition Scheme (20.0%, n=12). Of these the majority of responses reported that there were no tutors available, or it was too difficult to get a tutor (66.7%, n=8). Almost a third (33.3%, n=4) referred to issues around the qualifications or standard of signing by tutors as the reason they had not used the ISL Tuition scheme. Other comments included that the timing didn’t suit, the process was very slow, and that the scheme wasn’t fit for purpose for a number of reasons, including that there was no allowance for online classes, that the system was not online, and the process of parents getting a fee and paying the tutor had a number of inherent challenges.

Participants were asked how they would rate the ISL Tuition Scheme overall. Almost four in ten respondents rated the scheme as excellent or good (Total 38.3%, n=23; Good: 25.0%, n=15; Excellent: 13.3%, n=8), one quarter thought it was ‘ok’ (25%, n=15) and just over one fifth thought it was very poor or poor (Total: 21.7%, n=13; Poor: 10.0%, n=6; Very poor: 11.7%, n=7).

**Figure 5. Overall rating of the ISL Tuition Scheme**

Respondents who had used the ISL Tuition Scheme were asked about how easy it was to avail of and manage the scheme (Figure 6).

* Over six in ten of these respondents found it was easy to apply for and get approved for the scheme (61.9%, n=26), while almost one quarter did not find it easy (23.8%, n=10). Almost fifteen percent (14.3%, n= 6) found it somewhat easy to apply for and get approved for the scheme.
* Just over half of respondents said it was not easy to find a tutor (52.4%, n=22). Almost one quarter said it was easy to find a tutor (23.8%, n=10), and the same amount said it was somewhat easy.
* Just over four in ten respondents who had used the ISL Tuition Scheme said it was easy to manage the administration of the scheme (40.5%, n=17), just over three in ten said it was somewhat easy (31%, n=13), and 28.6% said it was not easy (n=12).

**Figure 6.Ease of use of the ISL Tuition Scheme**



#### How to improve access to the ISL Tuition scheme

Three quarters of respondents gave suggestions as to how the ISL Tuition Scheme could be improved (75%, n=45). The most common suggestions were to have a central database or list of tutorsavailable for areas (16.7%, n=10) and to improve the payment system (16.7%, n=10), with most of these answers referring to the need for payment to go directly to tutors rather than through parents:

Pay the tutors directly - it’s hard having to manage the payments. It can be embarrassing when the payments are delayed arriving into my bank.

Almost 12% responded that more tutors would improve the scheme (11.7%, n=7), and related to that, one in ten referred to the challenges in getting a tutor(10.0%, n=6). Almost 12% suggested that the application process be improved by making it easier and faster (11.7%, n=7), including for example having fewer forms to fill and making the process of reapplying easier. Related to this, four respondents referred to the challenges of the application process:

The process each year to apply, is ridiculous, each year the forms are not available until start of the school week, yet it takes weeks to get all the signatures etc, if you use last year’s form to get a head start it is rejected, even if content is not different....a huge waste of time.

Almost 12% of respondents recommended more tutor hours or flexibility with how hours are used (11.7%, n=7). Just over 8% referred to the need for more promotion of the service and provision of information on how to access the service, for example, through ISL video, subtitles and through information leaflets given to parents who have received a deaf or hard of hearing diagnosis for their child (8.3%, n=5).

Almost 7% of respondents referred to the need for a curriculum for what is taught by tutors (6.7%, n=4). Five percent of respondents gave suggestions for ensuring quality of tutors, through for example setting minimum standards or qualifications, through recommendations/ references, and through training for ISL tutors to formalise and improve standards (5.0%, n=3). Related to this, one respondent suggested that teaching quality be improved and another referred to the need for more experienced tutors. Two respondents referred to the need for attitudes within the service to be improved, referring to some of the people they’ve engaged with as ‘bureaucratic’, ‘unhelpful’ or ‘unprofessional’.

Other suggestions included improvements to existing process such as giving more direction to parents and tutors as to how to make the most of the service, improving communication barriers when ISL tutors don’t have spoken English, and having a mechanism for complaints if a tutor doesn’t show up, Suggestions also included potential new approaches such as having remote online access to tutorials, prioritising the service for those children who need it most, and making the service accessible to all deaf children and not discriminating against verbal deaf children. One parent said that the whole system needed to just start again. Another parent suggested an online portal to improve the system:

Create an online portal for parents to apply, log hours undertaken. A place where qualifications of the tutor are held, payments go directly to tutor and the tutor can work remotely if requested.

### Supports in school for children who are deaf or hard of hearing whose primary language is ISL

#### Access to the curriculum

Almost four in ten parents reported that their child had access to the curriculum through ISL (38.3%, n=23), Almost a fifth (18.3%, n=11) reported that they had partial access, while over one quarter reported that their child did not have access to the curriculum through ISL (26.7%, n=16). Ten respondents answered not applicable or that they did not know (16.7%).

#### ISL fluency in teachers

One fifth of parents reported that their child had a teacher who was a deaf native ISL signer (20.0%, n=12), while one quarter had a teacher with fluent ISL (25.0%, n=15), and 18.3% had a teacher with non-fluent ISL. One respondent did not know about their child’s teacher and 45.0% of respondents did not answer this question (n=27).

#### ISL fluency in SNAs

Over one fifth of respondents reported having an SNA with fluent ISL (21.7%, n=13). Fifteen percent reported that their child had an SNA who was a deaf native ISL signer (15.0%, n=9). Just over 8% had an SNA who was not fluent in ISL (8.3%, n=5), while 5% had an SNA with ISL qualifications (5.0%, n=3). Five percent (5.0%, n=3) of parents did not know the ISL fluency of their child’s SNA, while for 8.3%, their children did not have an SNA (n=5) and 43.3% of respondents (n=26) did not answer this question. Over one quarter of parents reported that their child had an ISL assistant (26.7%, n=16), 16.7% didn’t have an ISL assistant (n=10) and 13.3% did not know if their child had one (n=8). Almost half of respondents (43.3%, n=26) did not answer this question.

#### Challenges to ISL supports in school

Just over seven in ten respondents provided information regarding the main challenges to accessing education through ISL for children who are deaf or hard of hearing within the school system (71.7%, n=43). The most common response related to ISL not being available in mainstream schools, and only in schools for those who were deaf or hard of hearing (16.7%, n=10). One respondent referred to the challenge with education:

There has been, as yet, no defined established role set to provide meaningful language support for Deaf children attending mainstream school. The SNA model is not fit for purpose in offering Deaf children sufficient language and social support.

Related to this, one respondent noted that their child had great access as they were attending a school for deaf children. The next most common response was children not having access to teachers, SNAs or senior leadership teams with ISL (15.0%, n=9). Others referred to the difficulty for families and schools accessing particular services, including a suitable tutor, ISL for all classes, a communication assistant, preschool ISL support, an SNA, and services for exams (11.7%, n=7).

Just over 8% of respondents referred to the lack of awareness, understanding or knowledge of schools and teachers around deafness, around children’s requirements, or of the importance of ISL to a child’s mental health (8.3%, n=5). Three respondents (5.0%) noted that a challenge was schools using Lámh instead of ISL as it is quicker and easier for the teacher to learn, and one respondent noted that this was causing frustration in her child. Two respondents referred to the fact that those teaching have no access to proper ISL qualifications, and two others referred to the challenges with poor or varied level of signing in teachers with one parent noting that this was:

…causing tremendous frustration, tiredness from having to lip-read most classes, de-motivating and extremely damaging to their self-worth.

Two respondents referred to not having information around what supports are available, with one saying they:

had to fight even to learn what was available for child.

Over one fifth of parents (20.0%, n=12) described other challenges, including the distance their child has to travel for school, and another’s child having to leave a school as the school did not take on board the information about ways in which their child’s understanding could be impacted including when teachers talked with their backs to the students. Others referred to a lot of red tape, stigma for being different, the need for other children to know ISL, that English and technology were challenges as was the fact that there was no access to ISL tuition for parents. Another referred to there not being enough options to attend a deaf unit or schools, while another whose child was in a school for the deaf noted that the school was not as bilingual as you would expect (i.e. did not use ISL as much as the parent had expected), and that their child’s teacher was not fluent in ISL. This respondent noted that children with access to sound are dropping ISL as they are not given the same access to the curriculum through ISL as they get through English. Another challenge noted was that the curriculum was not designed with ISL in mind.

#### Additional provisions needed for children in schools

Almost two thirds of respondents gave suggestions on additional provisions that need to be made to support children whose primary language is ISL within the school system (65.0%, n=39). The most common response related to ways in which the child’s communication could be facilitated by having access to ISL through individuals such as interpreters, a communication assistant, or an ISL assistant (25.0%, n=15). In these answers, respondents referred to the need for people to be fluent in ISL, for children to have full access to them, for example in all classes and exams and in interactions with peers. One parent noted:

There is an absolute need for someone with fluent ISL to be present with the child otherwise there is no possibility of the child being able to access the curriculum.

Another respondent noted:

My [child] needs an interpreter in school, someone who can tell [them] what the teacher is saying what [their] friends are saying. Someone who can make sure [they understand] what [they are] being told.

The next most common response related to the need for ISL training for teachers and SNAs (15.0%, n=9). Some respondents felt that there should be more teachers and SNAs with fluent ISL, and some felt teachers and SNAs should receive mandatory training in ISL. Another noted that there should be an agreed minimum level of ISL for all teachers. Related to this, one respondent suggested that there should be more teachers and SNAs in general.

Almost 12% of all respondents answered that additional provisions for children in school are needed in the form of ISL being taught in mainstream schools and schools for deaf children, or as a subject at Junior or Leaving Certificate (11.7%, n=7).

Three parents (5.0%) referred to the need for specific professional supports for children, two suggested more speech and language supports. A further three comments (5.0%) referred to the need for general support for deaf children - for their development to independence, to make sure these children are not excluded or isolated, and to listen to them even if they are using ISL. Two parents referred to the need for technology supports, with one specifying access to laptops and iPads.

Eight parents listed other provisions which should be made, including a challenge to attitudes on the abilities of deaf students, to recognise that the child’s ISL is meaningful, and that the extra work is worth it – that “She/he is a person.” Other parents suggested an ISL course, that there could be two teachers in a class, one speaking and one signing, and another suggested children and parents should be informed as to what supports are available.

### Children’s participation in social, educational and cultural events, services and activities

Parents had very little awareness of specific government funds to support their children’s participation in social, educational and cultural events, services and activities with only 6.7% aware of such funds (n=4). Over nine in ten were not aware of any such government funds (93.3%, n=56).

Just over half of respondents (51.7%, n=31) reported that their child had missed out on social, educational or cultural services and activities because of lack of access through ISL, while 38.3% had not missed out (n=23) (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Had children missed out on social, educational or cultural services or activities because of lack of ISL**

#### Challenges to accessing social, educational and cultural events, services, and activities for children

Over six in ten respondents provided information on the main challenges in accessing social, educational and cultural events, services and activities for children through ISL (63.3%, n=38). The three main themes of challenges were no access to activities through ISL, a lack of interpreters, and a lack of knowledge and awareness.

One in ten referred to there being limited or no access to activities through ISL (10.0%, n=6). A further 10.0% referred to there being limited or no availability of interpreters (n=6), with one specifying no availability of suitably qualified interpreters. A lack of knowledge and awareness in a range of areas was raised by one in ten respondents (10.0%, n=6), including a lack of awareness or knowledge in ISL by providers, why children need it, of culture and accessibility and by clubs and societies about how to book interpreters.

Just over 8% of respondents referred to there being a lack of activities/events including ISL(8.3%, n=5), and a lack of knowledge of what is available, that there is no centralised advertising of events. Almost 7% of respondents referred to a lack of parental knowledge (6.7%, n=4) in how to access ISL for such events/activities, or that this facility was even possible.

Two parents referred to access to events through ISL as ‘very hard’ and two answered that communication difficulties were the main challenge. A further two parents referred to the isolation of their children when access through ISL is not facilitated:

…not [being] able to access language can be very isolating as they don't feel fully able to share the experience.

One in five respondents reported other challenges or comments (20.0%, n=12). This included that the voucher scheme as proposed under Section 9 of the Act has not yet commenced, the issue of stigma from others, the challenge of asking for support more than once and not getting it, and that it can be frustrating at the theatre if an interpreter is not available. Other responses included that information was a challenge, that ISL needs to be taught to children more, and that perhaps committees and societies did not want the expense of providing interpreters. One respondent noted that school plays, plays, pantomimes, media and TV include ISL and another that Chime and Cork Deaf Association (CDA) are the only organised bodies in relation to ISL. One response to this question related to providing community and integrating into the wider community as a challenge, while another referred to a lack of acceptance around deaf children’s needs.

### Accessing court services through ISL for children

A limited number of respondents had children who had been involved in legal proceedings where they had to attend court in the previous three years. Due to these small numbers their responses will not be presented to avoid any possibility of making a participant identifiable.

### Other comments about how well the ISL Act is working providing access to public services through ISL for children

Forty-one respondents provided additional comments. The most common themes from these comments were that it is unclear which public services offer ISL interpretation or what entitlements the ISL Act creates (19.5%, n=8), that the ISL Act is not working (12.2%, n=5), and that services are not aware of ISL access entitlements (9.8%, n=4). Other comments covered a range of topics and concerns including positive comments that while things are improving only slightly it is great to see improvement, and numerous comments on concerns with education including regarding SNAs, teachers, and the ISL Tuition scheme. Comments also included mention of the need for more access to ISL classes, concern with discrimination and the need for interpretation for children’s appointments.

1. Deaf’’ with a capital ‘D’ is used by the Deaf community, to identify membership of a unique social, cultural and linguistic group. The lowercase ‘d’ (deaf) is used when talking in the audiological form or for someone who does not see themselves as being part of a culture or Deaf community. It is acknowledged that many deaf people prefer the term Deaf with a capital ‘D’, however for the purpose of this report the lower class ‘d’ is used to reflect the terminology of the ISL Act and the UNCRPD. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The term ‘ISL community’ is used to include all people that use ISL or advocate for those that do [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Age Action (2020). Supporting Digital Literacy Among Older People. <https://www.ageaction.ie/sites/default/files/supporting_older_peoples_digital_literacy_briefing_paper_6_january_2020_update_of_paper_5_first_published_march_2018.pdf> (Last Accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. As a technical note, a cochlear implant or hearing aid does not provide standard hearing in all situations [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Lipreading provides access to about 30-45% of a conversation. RISLI (2020). Guidelines for Working with Irish Sign Language / English Interpreters. <https://risli.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Guidelines-for-Working-with-Interpreters.pdf> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Darragh Bermingham (2019) Providing sign language interpreter would have made course ‘unviable’. Echo Live. Tue, 16 April. [Online] <https://www.echolive.ie/corknews/arid-40154984.html> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Lámh is a manual sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in Ireland. Lámh is a type of augmentative or alternative communication system. Speech is always used alongside Lámh signs. Lámh signs are used to support communication and it is not a language itself. NCSE, ‘Lámh’. <https://www.sess.ie/lamh-4#:~:text=L%C3%A1mh%20is%20a%20manual%20sign,alternative%20communication%20system%20(AAC).&text=Signing%20naturally%20encourages%20people%20to,to%20work%20out%20the%20message>. (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Fingerspelling is a method of spelling words using hand movements. The fingerspelling alphabet is used in sign language to spell out names of people and places for which there is not a sign. British Sign, ‘Fingerspelling Alphabet’. <https://www.british-sign.co.uk/fingerspelling-alphabet-charts/> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The AIM programme is a government funded model of supports for children with disabilities to access Early Childhood Care and Education. AIM is managed and supported by Pobal, who are a not-for-profit company governed by a board of directors who are appointed by government. Oireachtas (2018). Pobal Briefing. <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_rural_and_community_development/submissions/2018/2018-01-31_briefing-pobal_en.pdf> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Napier, Jemina and Leneham, Marcel (2011) Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia “It Was Difficult to Manage the Communication”: Testing the Feasibility of Video Remote Signed Language Interpreting in Court. <https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi/vol21/iss1/5/> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Section 38 bodies are primarily funded by the state to provided key services, their employees are counted as public servants, and they include 39 significant entities with large amounts of funding, such as hospitals. Section 39 bodies include many more individual entities, funded to a smaller scale, and funding is to assist with the services offered rather than being the primary funding. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. RISLI, ‘About us’. <https://risli.ie/about/about-us/> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme referred to in Section 5(b) was completed by the NCSE in March 2018. ISL supports are not mentioned in the formal recommendations, however it notes that the recommendations are intended to give effect to the proposal that “ISL qualified assistants are in place to support profoundly deaf students whose primary language is ISL.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Farrell, Theresa (2020). M.Ed. in Special Education Thesis: Teaching deaf/hard of hearing children in the modern-day classroom. A teacher’s experience of inclusion with deaf/hard of hearing children in the mainstream classroom. Trinity College Dublin. [unpublished] [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. NCSE, ‘Visiting Teacher’ <https://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Note that this example relates feedback received from public consultation and the NDA has not sourced further perspectives from the school, VT, NCSE or Department of Education about the example in question. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Department of Education and Skills. Circular 0030/2014: The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme to support teachers in meeting the care needs of some children with special educational needs, arising from a disability. <https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0030_2014.pdf> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Department of Education and Skills. Circular Letter 0061/2020: Revision Of Salaries For Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) With Effect From 1 October 2020. <https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0061_2020.pdf> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Details of the SNA scheme such as purpose, allocation etc. are set out in the Department of Education and Skills. Circular 0030/2014: The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme to support teachers in meeting the care needs of some children with special educational needs, arising from a disability. <https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0030_2014.pdf> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Under the current allocation model, the recommended SNA support per teacher for a deaf child is 0.25/0.5 of a fulltime SNA allocation. It is acknowledge that the allocation model is expected to change in the near future as a result of the 2018 NCSE Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. NCSE (2018) Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, A New School Inclusion Model to Deliver the Right Supports at the Right Time to Students with Additional Care Needs. NCSE Policy Advice Paper No. 6. <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NCSE-PAP6-Comprehensive-Review-SNA-Scheme.pdf> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Signed English: Signed English is a language support system and is not favoured by the deaf Community. It in essence replaces English words & grammar with handsigns – this is not the same as ISL and may not be understood by some members of the deaf community. SLIS, ‘About the deaf community’. <https://slis.ie/about-the-deaf-community/> (Last accessed May 2021)

Sign Supported English: It is a type of sign language that follows the spoken and reading English language and follows its structure. So it’s more “full” as it is translated word by word. Compared to sign language, it uses fewer words, it is more brief and it is not in the same structure as spoken English. <https://hearmeoutcc.com/sign-supported-english/> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. A programme by and for deaf people aired on RTÉ for 25 years up until 2014. ‘Hands On’ was a deaf community television show broadcast by RTÉ for 18 seasons from 1995 to 2014. Prior to this, a similar programme, ‘Sign of the Times’ was broadcast from 1988 to 1995. ‘Hands On’ was broadcast fortnightly on Saturdays about noon <<https://tv.signlangtv.org/shows/rte-hands-on/>>. Some sources state that it was broadcast fortnightly on Sundays, and that it was also subtitled, and had an English voiceover <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hands\_On\_(TV\_series)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hands_On_%28TV_series%29)>. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. The Irish Deaf Society describes ISL as “a visual and spatial language with its own distinct grammar and not only is it a language of the hands, but also of the face and body.” Irish Deaf Society, ‘Irish Sign Language’, <https://www.irishdeafsociety.ie/irish-sign-language/> (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. The ISL Act defines ISL as “the sign language used by the majority of the deaf community in the State” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Tactile or hand-over-hand sign language is where the person who is deafblind puts his or her hands over the signer’s hands to feel the shape, movement and location of the signs. Some signs and facial expressions may need to be modified and one-handed or two-handed tactile sign language can be used. The Anne Sullivan Centre for people who are deafblind, ‘Communicating with people who are deafblind’. <https://www.annesullivan.ie/advice-information/communicating-with-people-who-are-deafblind/#:~:text=Tactile%20or%20hand%2Dover%2Dhand,and%20location%20of%20the%20signs>. (Last accessed May 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)