



2023/160

18<sup>th</sup> May 2023

**Submission to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on a Discussion of Education Needs of Hearing-Impaired Students**

CISLI is the professional representative body of ISL interpreters in Ireland. As well as advancing the interpreting profession, CISLI's aims include working in close partnership with the Irish Deaf Society (IDS), the national Deaf-led organisation for the future benefit of \*Deaf people who use ISL.

CISLI has a current membership of 83 fully qualified interpreters; there are approx. 113 interpreters registered with RISLI, the Register of ISL Interpreters, which was established under the ISL Act 2017.

In accordance with UNCRPD note 1, CISLI urges the government to ensure that the IDS, the Deaf community DPO in Ireland, participates in all discussions that relate to the lives of Deaf people.

As learners and educators within all sections of the education system (from primary through to tertiary and further education), no discussion on Deaf education is complete without the input of Deaf people on their experience of this essential system.

Furthermore, while interpreters work across the education system, we are not (in general) experts in Deaf education. Ireland is fortunate to have a number of experts (Deaf and hearing) in this area. CISLI urges the Joint Committee to invite these experts to contribute to future discussions.

CISLI supports the model described in the IDS' education policy paper (attached to this submission) that Deaf learners should be educated in inclusive environments "with direct instruction in sign language, access to Deaf teachers and Deaf peers who use sign language, and a bilingual curriculum that includes the study of sign language" (IDS Education Policy Paper, p. 4).

CISLI recognises the importance and benefit of interpreting in a myriad of educational scenarios and settings. However, we also understand that the presence of a small number of adult professionals in a school setting cannot replace the language-rich learning environment required to acquire proficiency in your first language and the facilities that this provides, which include a channel to learning other languages (such as English), access to incidental learning, access to friendships and social status, as well as the means to establishing a secure sense of identity, and greater resilience and mental wellbeing.

This must also be considered in a context where the use of ISL in the home may be limited, and where access to ISL by other means, for example through broadcast media, is practically non-existent; even online there is very little age appropriate or educational content in ISL.

\*This document will use Deaf with a capital D to refer to members of the Deaf community who use ISL as their preferred language.

As identified in the recent NDA report on the implementation of the ISL Act, the greatest challenge currently in the provision of interpreting services is the shortage of interpreters. The effects of this have become more noticeable in recent years as the demand for interpretation increases.

As already mentioned, there are 113 registered sign language interpreters in Ireland, compared to 500-600 interpreters in Finland, which has a similar size Deaf community.

At present, the most direct route to qualify as an interpreter is to complete a four-year bachelor's degree at the Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS), Trinity College. Applications are by CAO, therefore they are open to everyone including those with no knowledge of ISL.

The number of places available at CDS is limited; there is a maximum of 20 places across the three courses provided (ISL interpreting, ISL teaching and Deaf studies), with an annual average of 4 students graduating from the interpreting programme.

The Centre for Deaf Studies has developed a one-year master's in ISL interpreting for people with an existing knowledge of ISL. Our understanding is that no funding has been allocated for the implementation of this programme. CISLI urges the government to provide funding for qualification in order to grow the pool of interpreters in the shortest period of time possible.

Furthermore, as it is not possible to train ISL interpreters without ISL teachers, CISLI requests that the government increase its support for the teaching qualifications provided at CDS, and with a long-term projection, the Bachelor of Education (ISL). This is taught at DCU and is the first qualification in Ireland that enables ISL users to become primary school teachers. The first cohort of students will qualify this academic year.

The development of an ISL curriculum at primary and secondary levels is also urgently required.

The aforementioned NDA report identified many of the daily barriers encountered by Deaf people, for example accessing healthcare and other vital public services. Despite the suite of legislation on the statute books (ie ISL Act, Equality Act, Disability Act etc), access to all forms of education remains challenging.

Lifelong learning opportunities for both professional and non-professional purposes, including general interest courses, part-time qualifications and courses provided by private colleges are often out of reach of Deaf adult learners due to a failure or refusal to provide interpretation. This also happens in publicly funded bodies. For example, will interpretation support be provided as a matter of course on the redeveloped apprenticeship scheme?

While CISLI understands that employment is not the remit of this committee, it would be remiss of us not to highlight the difficulty experienced by many Deaf people when looking for work. A recent report produced by the European Disability Forum found that among EU countries Ireland has the lowest rate of people with disabilities in employment (32.6%), and the highest gap between employment rates of persons with and without disabilities, which is 40%, compared to an EU average of 24.4%.