
22 November 2018
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1. Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1 – Recruitment of two in-house ISL interpreters**

- The Working Group strongly recommends the recruitment of two experienced in-house ISL interpreters to carry out a number of identified tasks, including, but not limited to, interpreting content for Oireachtas TV, interpretation of live debates in the Houses and Committees and support for deaf visitors to the Houses and deaf staff members.

**Recommendation 2 – Provision of regular ISL signed tours and other supports for deaf visitors on tours**

- The Working Group recommends the introduction of regular signed tours for visitors to Leinster House. The dates of these will be notified in advance to interest groups to maximise awareness and attendance.

**Recommendation 3 – Training supports for staff and members**

- The Training Unit will offer deaf awareness training to Members and all staff. Civil service staff who wish to undertake ISL courses are already supported under the Refund of Fees Scheme. Front line staff will also be offered training in basic ISL training. It is recommended that in-house ISL courses should be provided at different levels, as is the case with Irish language classes, to facilitate progression and be offered to all staff on a phased basis.
Recommendation 4 – Promotion of the language services element of the Public Representation Allowance which may be used to meet the cost of ISL interpretation

- There appears to be a lack of awareness among elected representatives and the Deaf Community that ISL interpretation expenditure is permissible under the Public Representation Allowance, for both one-to-one, and public, meetings.

Recommendation 5 – Broadcasting: Access Rules, facilities for broadcasting and access to archived material

- The Working Group recommends that Oireachtas TV continues to meet or, if possible, exceed the targets set for it in respect of ISL interpretation and subtitling. The Broadcasting Unit should continue to be actively engaged with the Deaf Community to deliver additional signed content using its new ISL studio and using new technologies to continue to increase the volume of subtitled content. The Working Group further recommends that interested parties be advised of new content when available, especially archived material.

Recommendation 6 – The Oireachtas website should develop and maintain a dedicated Oireachtas TV ISL page and should integrate ISL on static content pages where possible

- The Working Group recommends that the Oireachtas website maintains an Oireachtas TV ISL page with weekly signed content readily available. Furthermore, where possible, static content pages of the website should have ISL videos integrated and these should be reviewed and revised periodically as new static content pages are published. Twenty-five static content pages have been identified for signing and ISL videos of that text will be integrated in those pages.
Recommendation 7 – The Working Group has identified placement opportunities for (a) members of the Deaf Community, and (b) undergraduate interpreters, based in the Leinster House Complex

- The Working Group recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas Service would facilitate paid placements for members of the Deaf Community on the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme run by AHEAD, and for postgraduate students of the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin, to work on issues of ISL promotion for a three-month period.

Recommendation 8 – Overall responsibility for delivery and review of the ISL Strategy

- The Working Group recommends that responsibility for the overall delivery of the ISL Strategy should be placed with the Communications Unit, including line management for the in-house ISL interpreters when recruited. The Working Group recommends that the implementation of the recommendation in the report be kept under review on a six-monthly basis and a new ISL Strategy should be produced every three years to match the timeline for the Commission’s subsequent three-year funding and the associated Strategic Plan.
2. Background to the Working Group

2.1 The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 (No. 40 of 2017) was signed into law on 24 December 2017. The Act provides for the recognition of Irish Sign Language, its use in legal proceedings, the provision of interpretation into Irish Sign Language by public bodies and for related matters.

2.2 The Act will come into operation not later than three years after the passing of the Act, by order or orders made by the Minister for Justice and Equality. No such order has yet been signed by the Minister.

2.3 Irish Sign Language is defined as the sign language used by the majority of the Deaf Community in the State. ISL is a discrete language with its own grammatical structure, which is distinct from other national sign languages such as British Sign Language and American Sign Language.

2.4 In accordance with best practice, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service (“the Service”) proposes to be an early adopter and leader in relation to this legislation and to produce a report on an Irish Sign Language Strategy for the Service.

2.5 In April 2018, the Business Committee approved the establishment of a Working Group on Irish Sign Language and the Working Group first met in June 2018.
3. The Working Group’s Work Programme

3.1 The Working Group was established in June 2018 by way of nominees from Principal Officers from areas which had responsibility for various elements relating to the Deaf Community within the Service. Nominees were also invited from political staff via Party Whips. The full membership is listed in Appendix 1, on page 21.

3.2 The Working Group was tasked with examining steps to achieve Irish Sign Language supports for:

- Witnesses and visitors attending the Houses and Committees for specific debates;
- Viewers of Oireachtas TV through continued compliance with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland’s Access Rules;
- Visitors to our website and social media sites;
- Visitors on tours; and
- Members and staff.

3.3 Between its formation and the presentation of this report, the Working Group met on nine occasions.
4. The Working Group’s Consultations

Working Group’s consultations

4.1. In carrying out its work, the Working Group met and consulted with representatives from:

- Irish Council for Sign Language Interpreters;
- Irish Deaf Society;
- Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin; and
- Chime (formerly DeafHear).

4.2. The Working Group also considered services available to support the Deaf Community in other parliaments, including seeking advice from a sign language interpreter who had worked in the European Parliament interpreting for a deaf MEP, and sought responses for initiatives under way in Government Departments/Offices.

4.3. The Chair also met with a member of staff from the Deaf Community on four occasions and their submission was considered by the Working Group.
5. Themes and Views from Consultations and Discussions with Stakeholders

5.1. There is a lack of supply of ISL interpreters, particularly for interpretation of language used in a parliamentary setting. The number of active ISL interpreters is estimated to be between 50 and 60 people;

5.2. Retention of available ISL interpreters is an ongoing issue due to the lack of both career progression and continuous professional development opportunities;

5.3. In order to accurately capture what is said in both Houses and Committees, an interpreting style which is able to convey both emotion and a range of parliamentary language not used in everyday speech is required. It can be difficult to convey statistics, that the bells are ringing or when there are many people speaking at once. It is also an issue if someone is speaking in Irish without following up with English text as only three to four ISL interpreters can interpret from Irish into ISL. Regarding the training required, it was expressed than anything shorter than the four year degree would result in a lower standard of interpreting. There is further work to be done in developing standards of interpreting and their regulation.¹ There is a need to match the needs of the Deaf Community with the skills of the ISL interpreters to provide a quality, professional service;

¹ This became apparent during exchanges the Working Group had with stakeholders.
5.4. The recruitment of two ISL interpreters was recommended by stakeholders so as to build up the knowledge of the parliamentary environment and expertise. This would facilitate the opportunity to establish a mentor-mentee relationship within the ISL interpreter team, as well as creating opportunities for career development and progression. A panel should be created so that any gap in service, which might emerge due to an ISL interpreter leaving, for example, could be filled at short notice. Agencies will continue to be used to supply suitably qualified interpreters for casual work or to facilitate a temporary increased workload;

5.5. It would be useful to promote and/or remind elected members and interest groups that the Public Representation Allowance element (Category 11 – language services) of the Parliamentary Standard Allowance covers ISL interpreting costs;

5.6. Staff with basic ISL training would be a welcome development so as to be able to greet people, but fluency can take up to four years to develop. Deaf awareness training should also be rolled out to all staff;

5.7. The Deaf Community would welcome the introduction of regular signed tours. Signed tours for children should be age appropriate and differentiated to take account of the language development stage of the group. Transcripts of the tour are considered more useful for those who are hard of hearing but should be readily available on request;

5.8. As suggested by several stakeholders, in the absence of an ISL interpreter, the provision of a signed and subtitled tour shown on a tablet would be very welcome for the deaf person to watch as they take the tour with the rest of the tour group;
5.9. Facebook is more widely used by the Deaf Community than Twitter so precedence should be given to it when posting items of particular interest to the Deaf Community. This will be kept under review. Members of the Deaf Community are not inclined to attend an event unless they are aware there will be ISL interpreting provided;

5.10. It would be useful to have a database of ISL signed Leaders’ Questions and other ISL signed content;

5.11. Regarding subtitles, the advice was that the Deaf Community would have a preference for a signed video over subtitling and this will be borne in mind when producing content;

5.12. The Oireachtas website is considered to be very text-heavy but groups welcomed the introduction of 25 videos of signed content coming online. The Deaf Community has a strong interest in history and politics as many were never taught these subjects in school; and

5.13. There is frustration among some stakeholders at the slow rate of change following the passing of the ISL Act. Some public bodies do not seem to have any awareness of the legislation.
6. Recommendations of the Working Group

**Recommendation 1**

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service should recruit two ISL interpreters to provide in-house interpretation covering the needs of the Houses, the Committees, Broadcasting Unit, the Superintendent’s Section and other in-house events.

6.1. The purpose of this recommendation is to provide in-house interpretation of the highest standards from experienced, qualified interpreters who can accurately interpret in ISL in a parliamentary environment and confidently present, for example, on Oireachtas TV and our other platforms. The Service will aim to recruit interpreters who meet ISO Standard/AIIC accreditation.

6.2. The recommendation is that two ISL interpreters would be recruited which will provide continuity of supply. The first interpreter would be someone with in-depth knowledge of the language used in the Houses with good experience of presenting for television. It is envisaged that this ISL interpreter would mentor a second, less experienced ISL interpreter over time.

6.3. Duties of the ISL interpreters would include signing daily Leaders’ Questions, signing for witnesses at Plenary and Committee meetings, signing tours, providing support for deaf members of staff, signing additional content for Oireachtas TV and website and increasing the amount of live signing of certain set pieces and debates of particular interest to the Deaf Community.
6.4. In addition, it would be necessary to have a draw down arrangement with an agency to provide suitably qualified ISL interpreters to support the in-house ISL interpreters during particularly busy periods of parliamentary business. Further resources would also need to be put in place in the event that a member of the Deaf Community is elected to either House.

Section responsible for recruitment: HR Unit

| Provision of regular ISL signed tours and other supports for deaf visitors on tours |
| Recommendation 2 |
| The Houses of the Oireachtas shall provide regular ISL signed tours for visitors. Interested parties will be notified of the dates when such tours will be held and will be asked to encourage members of the Deaf Community to attend. Initially these tours will be aimed at adults, but age appropriate signed tours will also be provided for children |

6.5. Currently, signed tours are provided where at least two week’s notice has been provided. The aim is to have regular ISL signed tours available to members of the Deaf Community.

6.6. The method of developing this tour will be to ask a number of ushers, ISL interpreters and members of the Deaf Community to take part in a trial signed tour, following which the participants would review the trial tour and agree an approach as to how the signed tours would be best delivered.

6.7. Following the successful delivery of a number of signed tours aimed at adults, the same process would be repeated to agree an approach for an age appropriate signed tour for children, which would be customised to take account of the language development stage of the group.
6.8. In addition to the provision of signed tours, where an ISL interpreter is not be available to sign a tour at short notice, a tablet device should be provided on which there is a signed and subtitled tour available to watch as the person joins a tour group. It is recommended that this signed and subtitled tour should be produced once the renovations to Georgian Leinster House are complete. It is recommended that this recording would also be made available to watch on the Oireachtas website.

6.9. A transcript of the tour should also be available as visitors who are hard of hearing find them very useful.

Section responsible for tours: Superintendent’s Section

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<th>Training supports</th>
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<td><strong>Training supports for staff and members</strong></td>
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6.10. Deaf awareness training should be offered to all staff and members. Such training should cover aspects such as Deaf Culture, ISL, communication tips, appropriate and inappropriate terminology to use, barriers and attitudes that deaf people face when accessing services and information, challenges and myths about lip-reading and basic ISL practice and deaf people working in a hearing environment.

6.11. ISL training is available to civil service staff under the Refund of Fees Scheme; political staff would welcome any financial support available when undertaking similar training.
6.12. A module for all staff should be devised, on a phased basis, with particular emphasis on front-line staff such as ushers and service officers, so that they have the basic communications skills for greeting members of the Deaf Community. Each political party/group should propose, via their administrators, the names of a minimum of one staff member to be trained to a basic level at least. Higher levels of classes should also be made available, in a similar way as those provided for Irish classes, and be offered to all staff on a phased basis. On successful completion of this module, a lapel pin could be awarded signifying that the person has basic ISL skills.

6.13. Deaf awareness training will be delivered by a deaf expert while ISL classes should be delivered by a qualified ISL teacher. Refresher courses at all levels should be offered annually, subject to sufficient demand.

Section responsible for training: Training and Development Unit

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<th>Promotion of Categories 2 &amp; 11 (language services) of the Public Representation Allowance for ISL interpreting fees</th>
<th>Recommendation 4</th>
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<td>During the hearings, it became clear that there is a lack of awareness that the Public Representation Allowance element of the Parliamentary Standard Allowance may be used to meet the cost of ISL interpretation. Category 2 (TDs) and Category 11 (Senators) of the Public Representative Allowance specifically relate to language services, including ISL interpretation</td>
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6.14. Members from the representative groups who met with the Working Group stated that there appears to be a lack of awareness by both elected representatives and members of the Deaf Community that ISL interpretations costs are an allowable expense under the Public Representation Allowance and may therefore be used to defray ISL interpretation fees and this should be brought to their attention.

6.15. The Working Group has established that the allowance can be claimed in the context of public meetings organised by elected representatives. Stakeholders have advised that private ISL interpreters should be booked at the time of organising the event (or at least two to three weeks in advance of the event) and administrators might have a role in that respect. Members, when advertising events, should highlight that ISL interpretation will be provided so that the Deaf Community can attend and engage in these meetings. In this context, it should be noted that in-house ISL interpreters would not be available for events organised by Members outside the Leinster House Complex.

6.16. Promotion of such events should be on Facebook preferably and by alerting interested parties in the area who can in turn advertise the event on their social media pages.

Section responsible for Members’ allowances: One Stop Shop
Section responsible for press and social media: Communications Unit
Broadcasting: Access Rules and facilities

Recommendation 5
Broadcasting: Access Rules, facilities for broadcasting and access to archived material

6.17. The Working Group recommends that the Broadcasting Unit continues to work within the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland’s (BAI) guidelines on the provision of ISL content. The BAI sets access rules for broadcasters to meet in respect of ISL interpretation and subtitles. Oireachtas TV currently exceeds its target under both headings. These targets are set every three years and are expected to increase when announced for the period 2019-21. This will be a challenge for all broadcasters. In addition, there is a requirement for broadcasters to engage with the Deaf Community, which Oireachtas TV will continue to do within the BAI process.

6.18. The Working Group recognises that the provision of a dedicated ISL studio for the Broadcasting Unit is essential to develop further signed content, outside of its requirements. The studio is expected to come online in February 2019.

6.19. In order to improve the broadcasting of ISL interpretation in the original Seanad Chamber, the Working Group recommended that wiring for a dedicated ISL camera be provided for during the renovation of the Chamber – this camera will come online when the Chamber is reopened in early 2019.

6.20. The Broadcasting Unit, in co-operation with the Web Team, has begun providing ISL signed Leaders’ Questions for a bespoke Oireachtas TV ISL content page on the website. This page will be curated actively, with ISL signed Leader’s Questions accessible for a month after broadcast, along with permanently available signed content such as our documentaries. It is anticipated that it will take until the end of December 2018 for the page to go live.
The Working Group recommends that interested parties be advised when the content is available via social media, particularly Facebook.

Section responsible for broadcasting: Broadcasting Unit

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<th>Oireachtas website – improvements for ISL users</th>
<th>Recommendation 6</th>
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<td>The Oireachtas website should develop and maintain a dedicated Oireachtas TV ISL page and should integrate ISL on static content pages where possible</td>
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6.21. The Working Group recommends that the Communications Unit should develop and integrate ISL content on Oireachtas.ie, and have regard to good practice from both the private and public sectors.

6.22. Members of the Working Group have examined the static content on the website and have identified 25 static content pages which are suitable for signing. Native/first language signers will be used to sign this content in ISL, which will be filmed and integrated on the relevant 25 pages of the website.

6.23. The archive of signed Leader’s Questions will be clearly visible within the Oireachtas TV section of the website and it is recommended that interest groups be advised when this content is available. Communications Unit should also use social media, especially Facebook, to promote new ISL content.

6.24. The new ISL signed and subtitled tour of Leinster House will be added to the other tours available in the Visit + Learn section of the website.

Section responsible for Oireachtas website: Communications Unit (Web Team)
The Working Group has identified placement opportunities for: (a) members of the Deaf Community, and (b) undergraduate interpreter students, based in the Leinster House Complex.

6.25. The Working Group identified two areas of opportunities as follows:

- A placement for members of the Deaf Community on the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme run by AHEAD. WAM is a paid mentored work experience programme which offers graduates with disabilities 6 months’ work experience and is paid at the first point of the Executive Officer scale. The WAM programme gives practical effect to Government and Civil Service policy on improving the employment prospects for people with disabilities. Last year, 17 WAM placements were made in the Civil Service; and

- The Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College Dublin would like to support placement(s) for postgraduate students in the Houses of the Oireachtas which would see the students working here on issues of sign language promotion for a three-month period. Funding for the placement would be under an application to a Marie Curie Innovative Training Network, which, if successful, would see the candidate fully funded by the project and undertaking the placement in 2021.

6.26. Additional informal work experience opportunities may be developed in the Broadcasting Unit for the benefit of students of the Centre for Deaf Studies, TCD, at the request of the Centre.
6.27. The Working Group is of the view that such opportunities should be made available and facilitated in the same manner as the Oireachtas Work and Learn programme.

Sections responsible for work placements: HR and Broadcasting

| Overall responsibility for delivery and review of the ISL Strategy | Recommendation 8 Overall responsibility for delivery and review of the ISL Strategy |

6.28. The Working Group recommends that responsibility for the ISL Strategy would rest with the Communications Unit, including line management for the in-house ISL interpreters when recruited.

6.29. Items of particular interest to the Deaf Community should be identified for live ISL interpreting in either House, Committee room or at a report launch or internal event. In this regard, the positioning of ISL interpreters in Committee rooms should be given careful consideration to see if it possible for an ISL interpreter to be visible on camera while also being visible to the Committee members, witnesses and public gallery.

6.30. Given the importance of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017, and the desire of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to be an early leader in the delivery of services to the Deaf Community, the Working Group recommends that this report be adopted by the Management Board, the Business Committee, Seanad Committee on Procedure and Privileges and the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, and the recommendations listed herein be fully implemented during the lifetime of the ISL Strategy.
6.31. The Working Group recommends that the implementation of this Strategy be kept under review on a six-monthly basis and a new strategy should be produced every three years to match the timeline for the Commission’s subsequent three year funding and the associated Strategic Plan.

Section responsible for the ISL Strategy: Communications Unit

The Working Group expresses sincere thanks to colleagues, in particular Ms Olive Rafferty, who assisted with, and advised on, the production of this report; and also Mr Cormac Leonard from the Irish Council of Sign Language Interpreters; Ms Elaine Grehan from the Irish Deaf Society; Professor Lorraine Leeson and Dr John Bosco Conama from the Centre for Deaf Studies, TCD; and Ms Julianne Gillen from Chime (formerly DeafHear) for their time, expert views and support.

The Working Group also sincerely thanks Mr Darren Byrne, Ms Amanda Mohan and Ms Caroline O’Leary who provided interpretation for the above meetings with stakeholders, and Ms. Romy O’Callaghan, Interpreter, who provided advice based on her experience working as an interpreter in the European Parliament.
Appendix 1: Membership of the Working Group

Breda Burke, Journal Office, Chair of the Working Group
Paula Cowan, Disability Liaison Officer
Shauna Coy, Journal Office
Derek Dignam, Head of Communications
Etainne Howlett, Committees Secretariat
Carol Judge, Seanad Office
Rhona McCord, Parliamentary Assistant to Deputy Clare Daly
Donnacha McKeon, Broadcast Manager
Ita Ní Dhonnchadha, Facilities Management Unit
Breda O’Mahony, Personnel Officer
Derek Walker, Journal Office
Karin Whooley, Web & Digital Marketing Manager